OLD!

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14-PAGE SPECIAL!

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FATAL FURY
BOXING
Nintendo
MICRO VS. SYSTEM

SNK LEGENDS EXPLAIN THE CREATION OF THE ICONIC GAME SERIES

MAME & WATCH

PRESERVING NINTENDO'S HANDHELD LEGACY

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MEET THE MAN BEHIND MARIO

WE TALK TO CHARLES MARTINET, THE VOICE OF NINTENDO'S STAR PLUMBER

THE EVOLUTION OF SUMMER GAMES

EPYX OLYMPIADS ON THE FRANCHISE THAT HIT GAMING GOLD

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Luke, RetroSix Team

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GAME BOY pocket

SELECT START
SELECT START

retrosix

RetroSix is a small team of people who have been in the gaming industry and retail business since 2013, and sold consoles, controllers and even designed our own controllers and consoles.

Putting that expertise to good use, we decided to start RetroSix; a small team of people passionate about retro gaming, and restoring original consoles to like-new, adding our own twist and style to them and in general bringing a modern twist to retro.

RETROSIXUK

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE THE KING OF FIGHTERS CHARACTER OR GAME?

DARRAN JONES

I think I'd have to go for Iori as he has a cool dress sense and an equally cool laugh.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls, a SNES-loving cousin and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing:
Lost Kingdoms
Favourite game of all time:
Strider

TIM EMPEY

Ryo Sakazaki has been my pick since *Art Of Fighting* (though you don't have much choice, it's either him or Robert). But his moves translated well to *The King Of Fighters* and he even makes an appearance in *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*.
Currently playing:
Yakuza: Like A Dragon
Favourite game of all time:
God Hand

NICK THORPE

King's unorthodox kicks make her a big favourite of mine throughout the series. Every time an opponent walks into a Trap Shot, it feels great.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing:
Jet Set Radio Future
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

ANDY SALTER

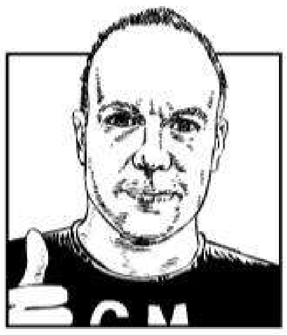
"What's your favourite *The King Of Fighters* game?" Tough one. I think I'd have to say The Best Of The King Of Fighters.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently playing: *M&B2: Bannerlord*… modded of course
Favourite game of all time:
Rome: Total War

ANDREW FISHER

The only one I own is *The King of Fighters '94* (on a Wii compilation) – with character cameos from *Ikari Warriors* and *Psycho Soldier*.
Expertise: Gaming for 39 years, from C64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Bit.Trip Presents: Runner 2 – Future Legend of Rhythm Alien*
Favourite game of all time:
Paradroid

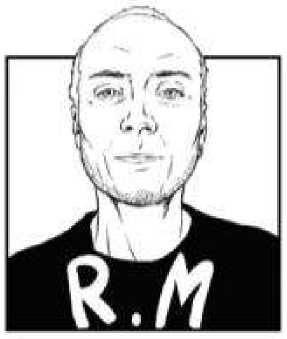
PAUL DRURY

I really liked *The King Of Fighters R-2* for the Neo Geo Pocket Color. Cute characters and some killer moves.
Expertise: Ball physics
Currently playing:
Skull & Crossbones
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



GRAEME MASON

The somewhat mean, yet impeccably cool, Iori Yagami. [Good choice – Ed]
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing:
Mass Effect Legendary Edition
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



RORY MILNE

I like SNK's Rambo – Ralf Jones – for his no-nonsense fighting style and his rich history, which stretches back to *TNK III* and the *Ikari Warriors* games, and takes in every *KOF* title.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Dizzy*
Favourite game of all time:
Tempest

PAUL ROSE

My favourite *KOF* character is Terry Bogard, as he's the only one I know.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing:
Star Wars: Squadrons
Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2

LOADING...

The King Of Fighters '94 was one of many reasons I yearned for a Neo Geo system. Its eclectic range of fighters and thrilling three-on-three battles blew me away and I'd constantly return to the series whenever a new game was announced. It's been a real pleasure to talk to SNK's legends about the much-loved series and find out what's planned for next year's *The King Of Fighters XV*. Other highlights of our latest issue include a look at *FIFA Soccer 95*, an excellent restoration project involving Nintendo's Game & Watch series along with a hilarious interview with Charles Martinet, the voice of Mario.

There's plenty more in this month's issue, including a look at the obscure Sierra On-Line adventure *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist*, an examination of the innovative Namco shoot-'em-up *Xevious* and a glimpse behind the scenes of the action-based horror series *The Suffering*. We've also persuaded Ashley Day to put together a new guide for collecting Saturn arcade games and have quizzed Michael Mendheim about *Mutant League Football*. In short this month's issue has something for everyone. I hope you enjoy it.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

retro GAMER
retro GAMER
THE KING OF FIGHTERS

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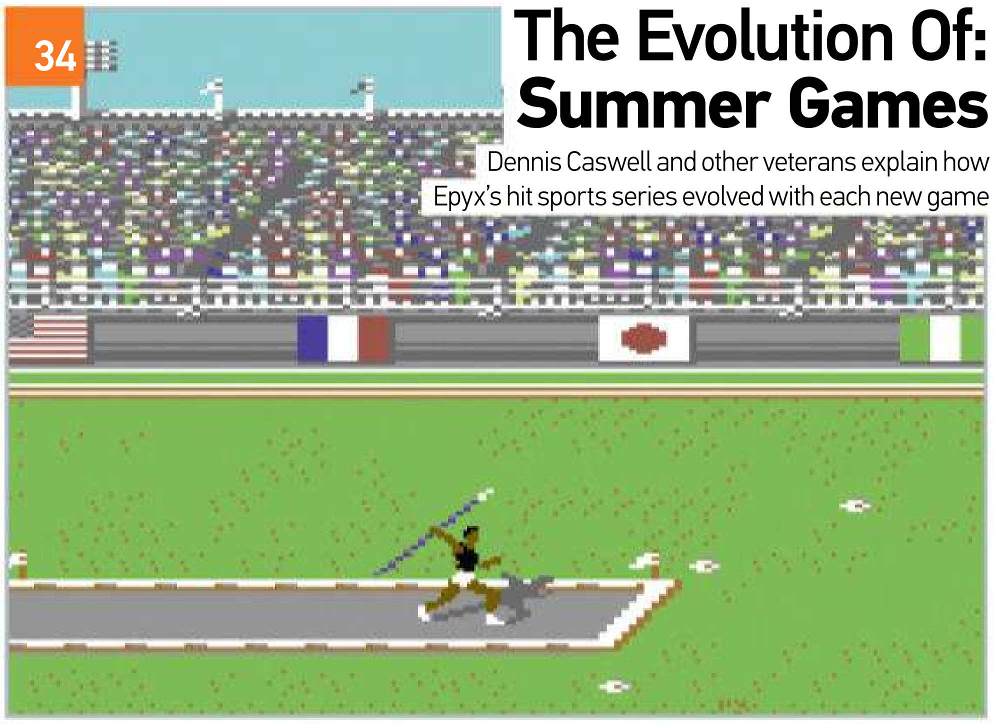

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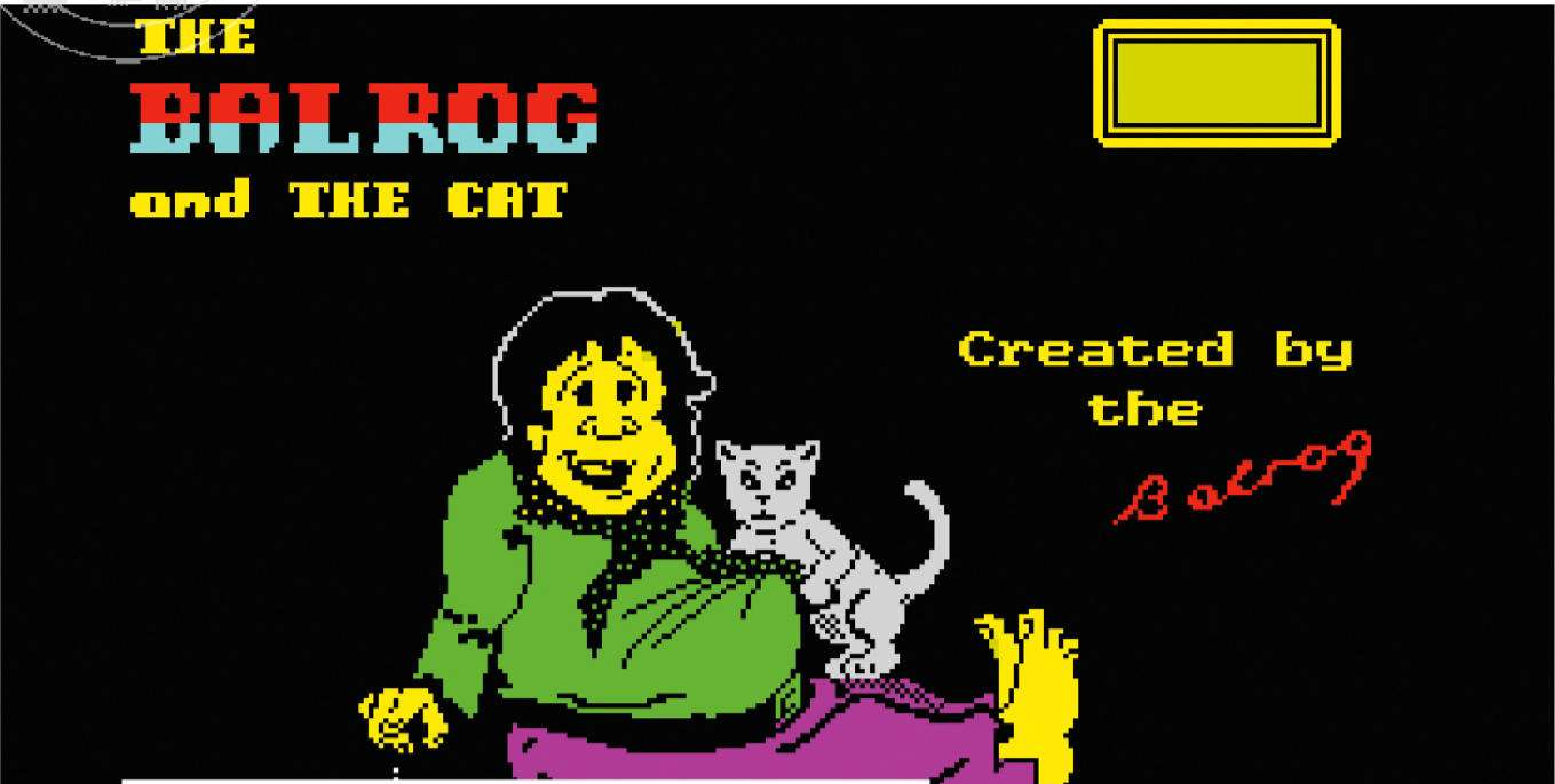

» [ZX Spectrum] In issue 85 of **Retro Gamer**, John recommended *The Balrog And The Cat* as a highlight of his games.

GOODBYE BALROG

Remembering John Wilson of Zenobi Software

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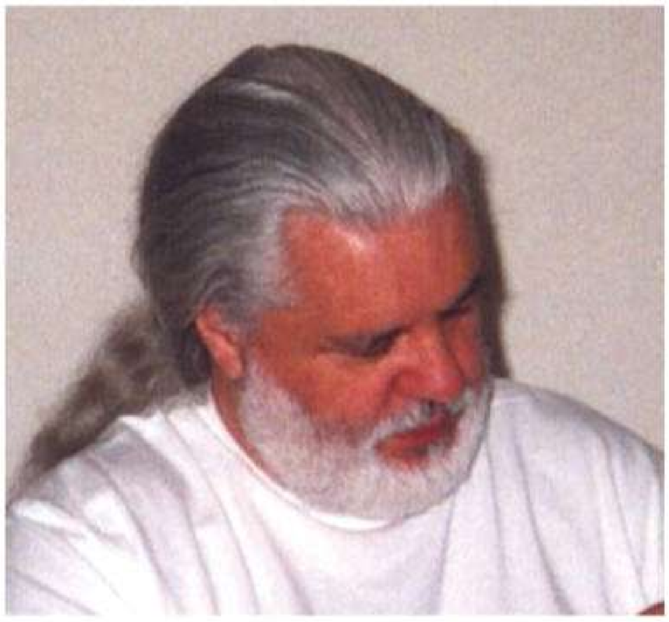
It's September 2004 and Nick is once again travelling through time

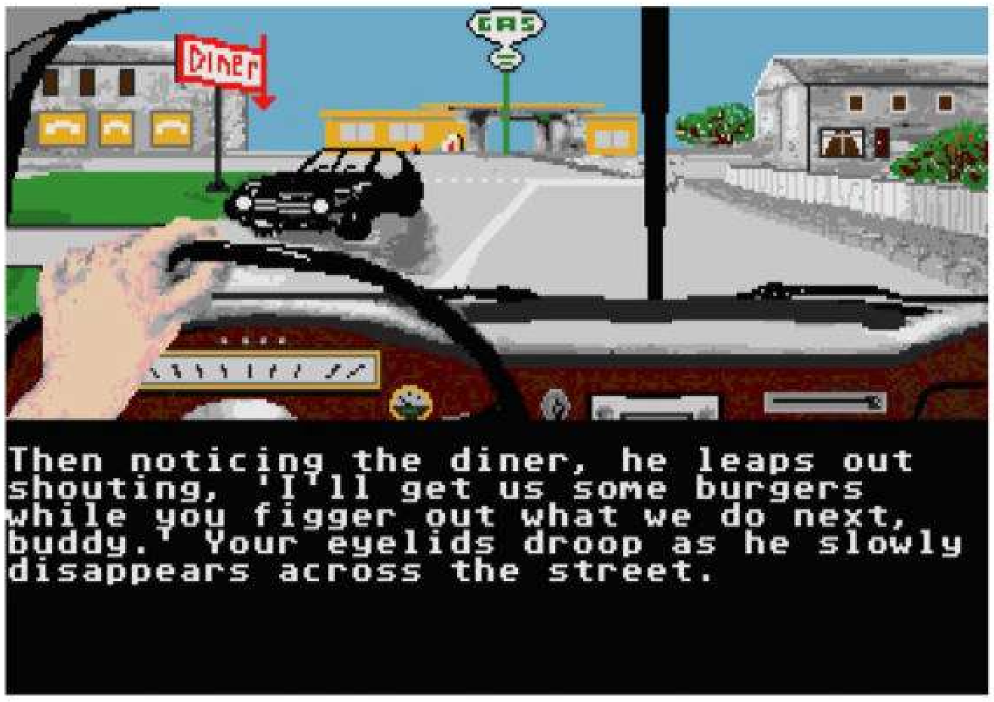
John Wilson, the founder of Zenobi Software and a prolific author of adventure games, sadly passed away on 31 May at the age of 74. Also known by his nickname 'The Rochdale Balrog', John had previously worked in the RAF and the building trade before moving into computer games in his late 30s. Having had experience of writing adventure games for other publishers, he founded Zenobi Software in 1985 as a way of distributing his own works and eventually those of others. Zenobi ceased publishing new games in 1997, but many of them remain fondly regarded by fans of adventure games to this day, and John himself has been a popular figure in the adventure game community. A number of John's friends have come forward to pay tribute to him as both a creator and a friend.

"I first encountered John when I was reviewing adventure games for magazines like *Your Sinclair*," says Mike Gerrard. "I loved his daft sense of humour, and that he made adventure games funny. We would write to each other from time to time and I was always pleased when a new Zenobi game turned up in the post. You never knew what to expect with a game from John, but they were always good. I also liked the way he supported other people, and was keen to publish other adventure writers on his Zenobi label, once it got established. I never met him but I know I'd have enjoyed his company. Rest in peace."

"I have known John for over 35 years, and collaborated on one text adventure with him and wrote another solo effort published in the late-Eighties on the Zenobi label," says Richard Hewison. "John was a huge computer game fan, but loved text adventures and during his Zenobi years he wrote and published so many games, keeping the genre going when most more commercial companies had long since abandoned them. Zenobi won awards and had an underground following who enjoyed his off-kilter sense of humour. His collection of 'single-room' adventures are a great example of John's dedication to the adventure cause, and he will be missed."

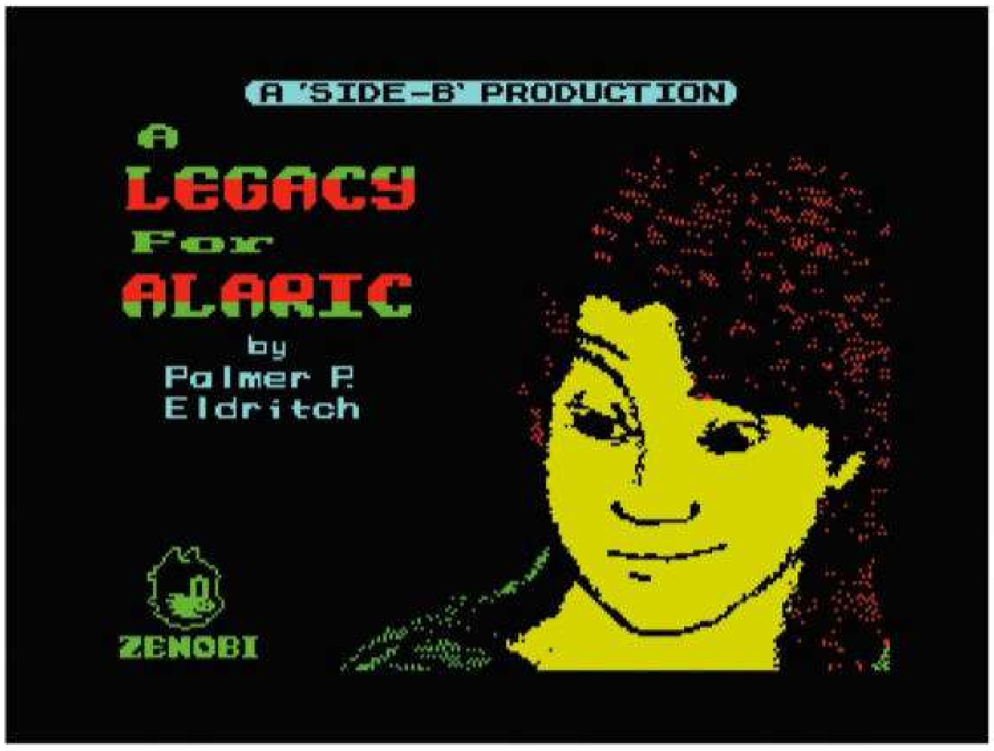
"I was shocked and saddened to hear of the news of John's sudden passing away," says David Ledbury. "For a long time, in the early Nineties, John Wilson's company – Zenobi – which was one of the leading lights in the home adventure scene, regularly


» Founder of Zenobi Software, John Wilson.

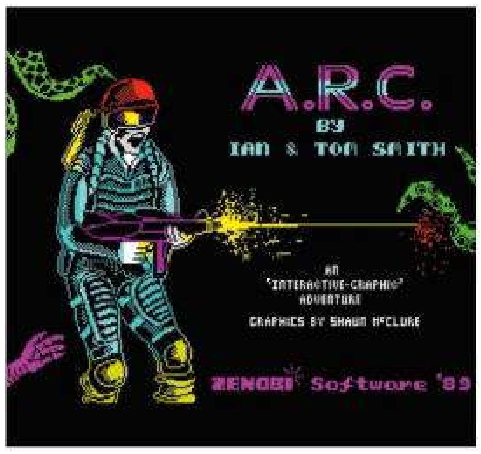


Then noticing the diner, he leaps out shouting, 'I'll get us some burgers while you figger out what we do next, buddy.' Your eyelids droop as he slowly disappears across the street.

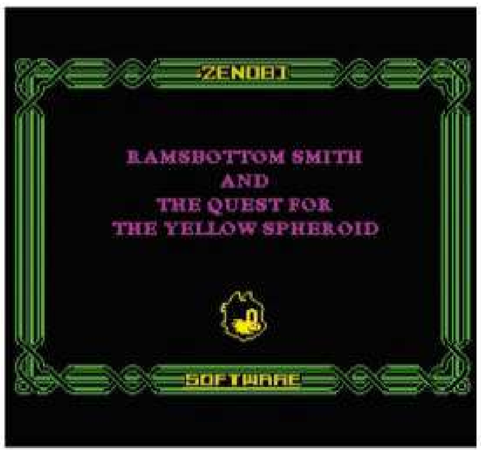
» [Atari ST] Though Zenobi is best known for Spectrum games, some Atari ST adventures were published too.



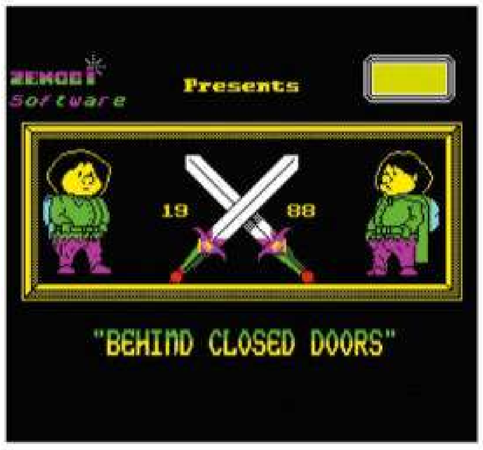
» [ZX Spectrum] Richard Hewison worked on *A Legacy For Alaric*, along with John Wilson.



» [ZX Spectrum] Shaun McClure provided the graphics for *Alien Research Centre*, published by Zenobi Software.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Ramsbottom Smith* was started in the Eighties, but not completed until 2018



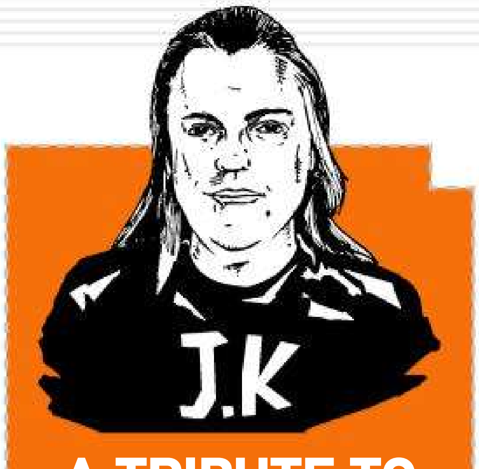
» [ZX Spectrum] John felt the *Behind Closed Doors* games "allow the player an insight into how my mind functions".

passed review copies and tips of his latest releases for his long-running Spectrum and SAM Coupé fanzine *ZAT*. John later worked with members of the SAM Adventure Club who found inventive ways to use the games he released, to make more usage of some of the SAM Coupé facilities – bringing Zenobi games to more fans. Many SAM adventurers benefitted from his support. The adventure scene has lost a landmark figure – although with more adventure releases coming out, for more and more systems, his legacy will still continue for some time to come."

"I loved John very much, I am shocked and saddened to hear of his death," says Chris Ainsley, author of Adventuron. "John was the first user of Adventuron, and will always be 'The Adventuron One' to me." John considered himself retired when he and Chris began to talk, but eventually created further adventures as well as ports and remixes of past work. "We corresponded hundreds of times, and for a good period of my life he was my best friend. I lived to please him, and whilst I can't speak for John, I know he loved to show me what he was doing," Chris continues. "I'm not related to John, I have never physically met John, but I shall treasure his memory forever. I grew to love him as if he were family. He had a gift of instant familiarity, not just with me, but with everybody. He wasn't a perfect person, but he made you love him. He was an old rogue and a child at heart. I will miss him dearly. There will never be another."

Shaun McClure first met John while he was a young artist creating loading screens for Spectrum games. "What differed with John was that I think he knew that my home life was quite difficult to say the least and I needed a sort of father figure to just basically 'talk bollocks' with – about girlfriends and so on, the music I had just bought – looking back it must have been the most cringey adolescent stuff ever, but we struck up this pen pal correspondence that only sometimes involved me doing graphics for John, and the rest was general chat. It was about three letters a week. He'd tell me about his own things and cat-related stuff and often tell me that some of the bands I liked were either good or 'utter derivative shite' on little pages that were about a quarter the size of A4, all handwritten." The work Shaun did for John ultimately helped to launch his career. "He recently made a sequel to *Alien Research Centre*, and as a bridge back to the past I did a 'loading screen' for it. And I'm glad I did. It sort of completed the circle of development with him after all of these years. Rest in peace John!"

Our thoughts are with John Wilson's friends and family.



A TRIBUTE TO
JASON KELK

Just as we were going to press, we sadly learned that Jason Kelk had lost his 14-month battle against COVID-19. Jason had been contributing to **Retro Gamer** since 2008 where his passion for coding made him the perfect person to write our Home Brew section. When we found out that he was suffering from COVID-19 and was admitted to hospital in late March 2020 we decided to put the section on hiatus until he was better, because for many of us, Jason was the heart of that part of the magazine and we wanted it to wait until his return.

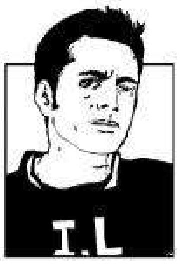
There will be a proper tribute to Jason next issue, but we wanted to take this opportunity to mention his tireless love for the Home Brew section and the joy he got from chatting to different coders each month and his sheer love of the subject matter, which shone through on every page. As the longest-suffering COVID-19 patient in the UK, Jason's passing has reached a great many people thanks to national news coverage and hopefully many will have now read about his brave battle. We've lost a valued contributor to the magazine, but his friends and family have lost so much more.

LIVES
BONUS
LEVEL 1

» [C64] Jason was a talented coder and created *RG Rampage* for our 100th issue.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. To find out more about Iain and what he's currently doing head to www.patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Keep it real



The first time I ever got a hands-on experience with Virtual Reality I came away a little confused. It was at the Trocadero in London, ultimately a very disappointing place that had arcade machines and the like. In fact, the best time I ever had there was an *Alien* interactive thing where you were guided through a floor that was set up to look like a spaceship and people dressed as the alien from *Alien* jumped out at you. I was a bit drunk and cacked myself. Not literally, you understand, but it was pretty damn close.

Some friends and I went to the Trocadero one day because we'd heard they had VR and we wanted some of that. In the mid-Nineties, the only time any of us had seen Virtual Reality (I'm assuming those two words together should always be capitalised? I'm starting to doubt it now, but let's stick with it) was of course in the documentary *The Lawnmower Man*. Side note, I once interviewed Jeff Fahey in Hawaii (showbiz baby!) and I hugged him to thank him for *The Lawnmower Man*. He smelt incredible. I just thought you may want to know that.

Thinking back, I'm not sure why I hugged Fahey. Turns out *The Lawnmower Man* lied to us. We had to queue for ages to get a go and it cost a fortune. Something like a fiver for three minutes. Remember, this is early Nineties fivers, so about £300 now. Four of us played at once and we had to each stand on a platform. We were told that under no circumstance could we move from the dais, but we could turn around. The object of the game, such as it was, was to shoot each other from quite a distance. This sounds like fun but honestly, I did not have a clue what was going on. The graphics were atrocious and I couldn't work out what was supposed to be a human or how to shoot. As soon as it started, the three minutes were over, the headset was ripped off and we were shoved out of the way so the next bunch of saps could have a go.

Here's the thing. It was a lousy experience but not one of us said so. We all enthused about how amazing it was and talked about what we would do to each other next time we played it. I can't be certain, but I am pretty sure all my friends thought it was as awful as I did but just couldn't quite bring themselves to say it. None of us wanted to admit that we may have just been ripped off and that actually it was a very poor game. Instead we walked away saying how amazing it was and how we would love another go but the queue was quite long and we should probably head home.

I never did go back and play it again. Aren't people just weird? *

> "Here's the thing. It was a lousy experience but not one of us said so"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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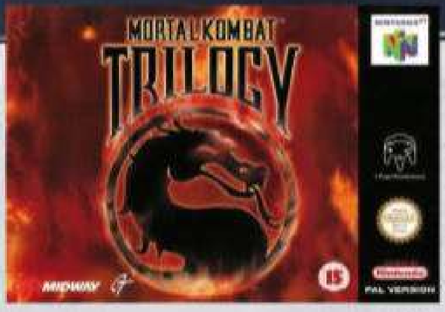
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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Putting in the time

As I write this… I'm three days into testing positive for COVID-19. I'd had my first jab, gotten a little cocky and thought I was pretty much untouchable now. Unfortunately, my youngest daughter brought it home from school, and the other three of us in the house quickly caught it. It's no fun. I can tell you that. But this time off has given me a chance to reflect on how I handled being ill when I was younger. I'm pretty lucky in that I don't tend to get ill to the point where I down tools and don't get out of bed, but COVID-19 has floored me. What it has taken me back to is being 11 or 12 and suffering from tonsillitis. The weeks I was off school with that were basically an excuse to get in as much playtime as possible.

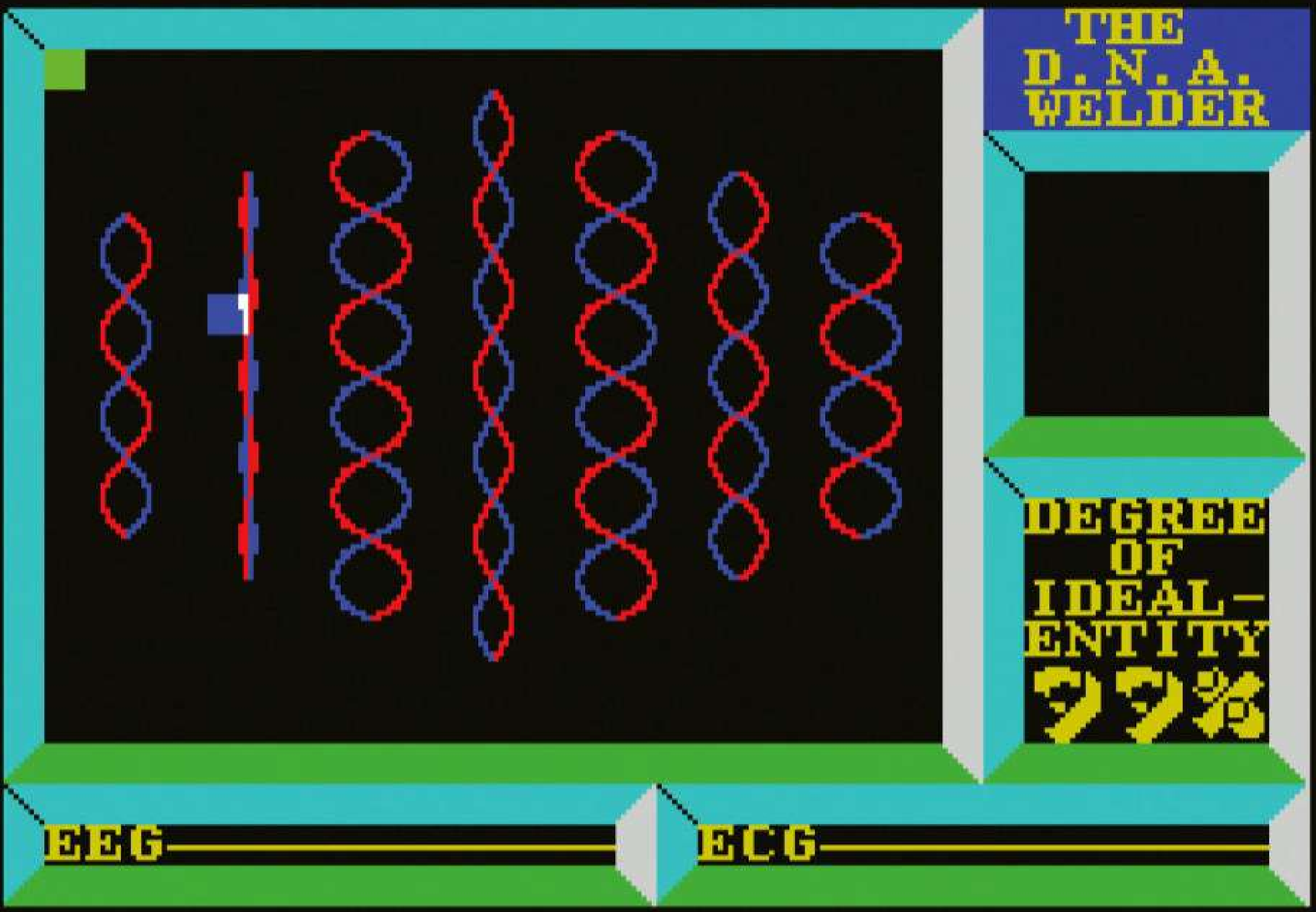
There was no Netflix back then, so my ZX Spectrum was how I passed those days. Hours on *Bugaboo The Flea*, Ian Livingstone's *Eureka!* and being baffled by Mel Croucher's *Deus Ex Machina*. I put in the time. I chipped away at their secrets. Admittedly, I never got very far on any of them, but I tried. I made the effort.

When I finally went into hospital to have my tonsils cut out, I took my *Donkey Kong* Game & Watch with me. Just one game, and I played it constantly. The same rhythm over and over and over. Jump, climb, jump, climb. It was frustrating, but I learned the nuances and quirks of the gameplay. Now, you can pretty much fit a decade's worth of games into a handheld of roughly the same size, and if one game isn't doing it for you… you can be playing another in a few seconds. Going into hospital with a Nintendo Switch would've felt like some sort of holiday!

While I would've loved to have that option as a kid, it does make me wonder whether the ease of being able to flit from one game to another, which progress has given us, devalues them in some way. To play a game back then, it was an effort to load it up. Because of the faff required to switch to a different game, I'd stick with it, and plug away. Even when, as in the case of at least a couple of the aforementioned games, I didn't know what I was doing.

Consequently, every game felt special, important. It felt as if games, simply due to the amount of effort required to play them, were worth putting in the effort to stick with. I admit, in this era of streaming and games-on-demand, if I'm not feeling a game I'll move on far quicker than I would've done 35 years ago. I play games more in bite-size chunks now. Back in the day, there was none of that.

When I think of the hours I'd focus on, say, trying to nail just one impossible jump, dying and going back to the start, and trying again, and dying again – and not giving up, but dying again – my head spins. Did I ever really have that amount of patience? *



Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

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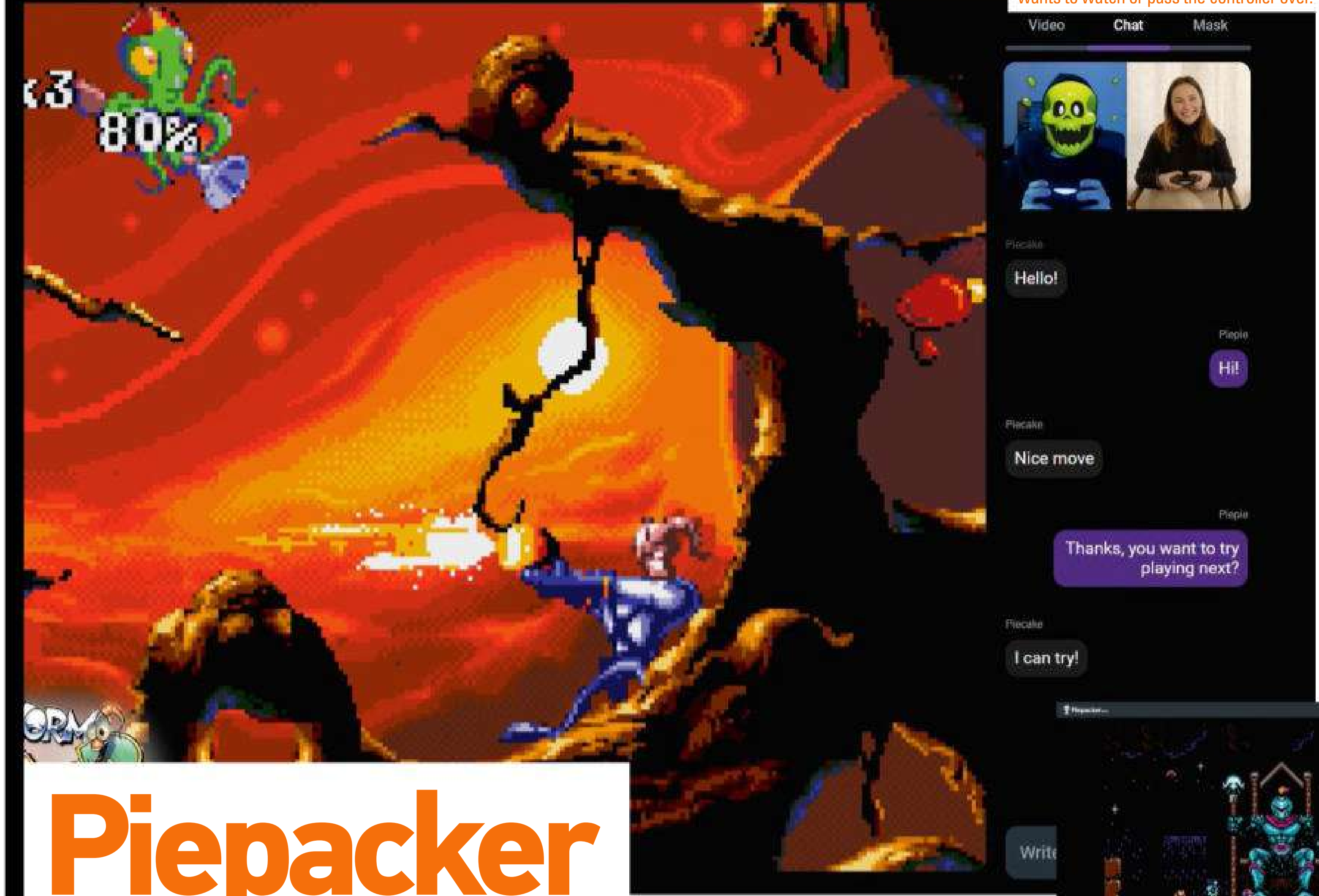


Video Chat Mask

Piecake
Hello!

Piepie
Hi!

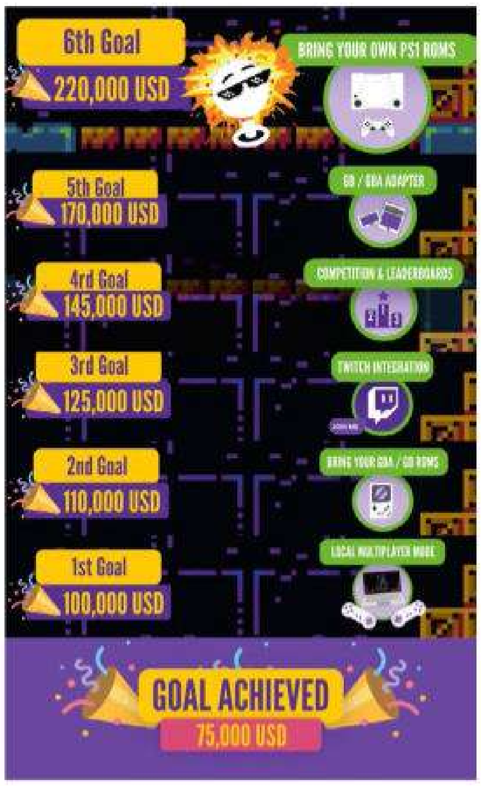
Piecake
Nice move

Piepie
Thanks, you want to try playing next?

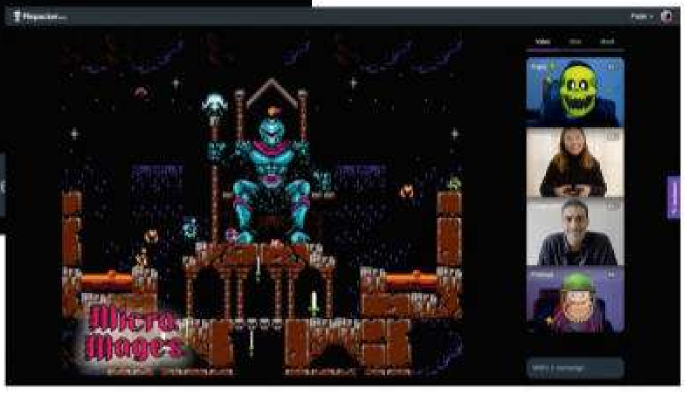
Piecake
I can try!

Write

» Even single-player games like *Earthworm Jim 2* work on Piepacker whether someone just wants to watch or pass the controller over.



» It will be interesting to see if the Kickstarter goals will extend to those who didn't get around to backing the project.



» Rooms can be for up to four people, though for issues around safety there are currently no plans for matchmaking.

Piepacker

Alan Wen chats to Benjamin Devienne on creating a free and accessible platform for people to hang out with classic games

Playing retro games with other people isn't so easy with busy lives and especially during a pandemic. Online solutions through emulation are also not especially accessible. Piepacker, which started off on Kickstarter and was funded in 20 hours, aims to change that as a new social platform where friends, family and colleagues can get together while playing a library of classic and retro-inspired games. We spoke to cofounder Benjamin Devienne to find out how it works.

How did Piepacker come about?

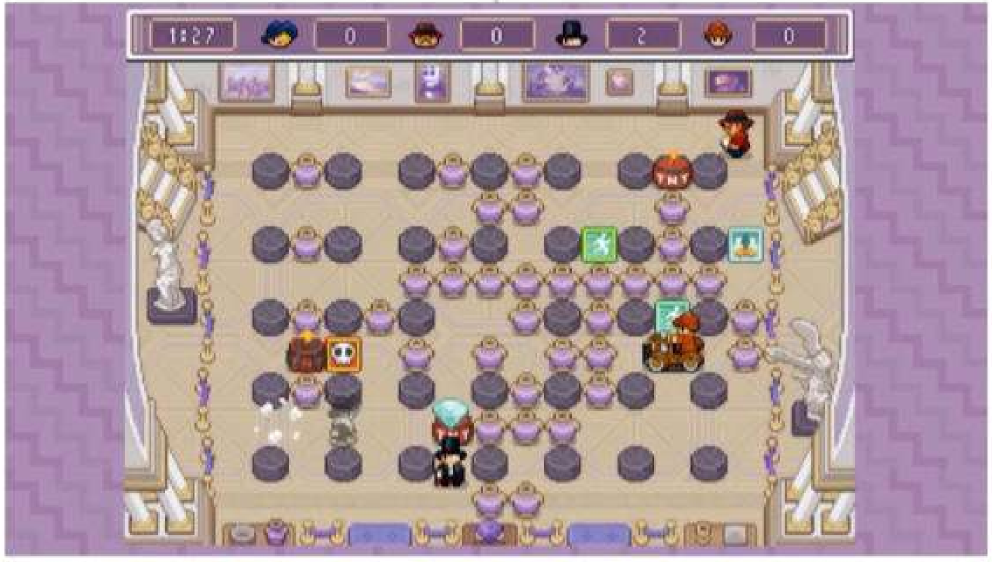
I've worked at EA, Ubisoft and Gameloft and then at Facebook and Twitch, which is how I got this mix of gaming and social, that's really the foundation of what Piepacker is. When we made the first prototype, we shared it with friends and family to collect data, and I asked them to also record their screen so we could get a sense of how they used the product. When we got videos back, everyone had put the game on one side of the screen and on the other side of the screen they were putting Zoom to hang out with their friends, but they weren't focusing on the game – the game was an excuse! We realised people were more interested in the social experience and wanted to emulate the feeling they had when playing retro games on the couch with friends, family, cousins, all those good times. This is the moment we decided to be more of a social network than a gaming platform.

What's different about Piepacker than just the current emulation solutions available?

To use Netplay on RetroArch, you need to be very tech savvy. You need the IP, you need the configuration, you need to remove the firewall – it takes you two hours to play for twenty minutes. We felt we should focus on being better than existing solutions on online multiplayer. It's also why we decided to have it on a web browser as there's no set up or installation, and it's OS agnostic. Piepacker is more for a casual audience that is interested in having quality time with their friends on classics. There's over 60 games, you can play with your friends, it's free, it takes one click and a web browser, that's pretty much it.

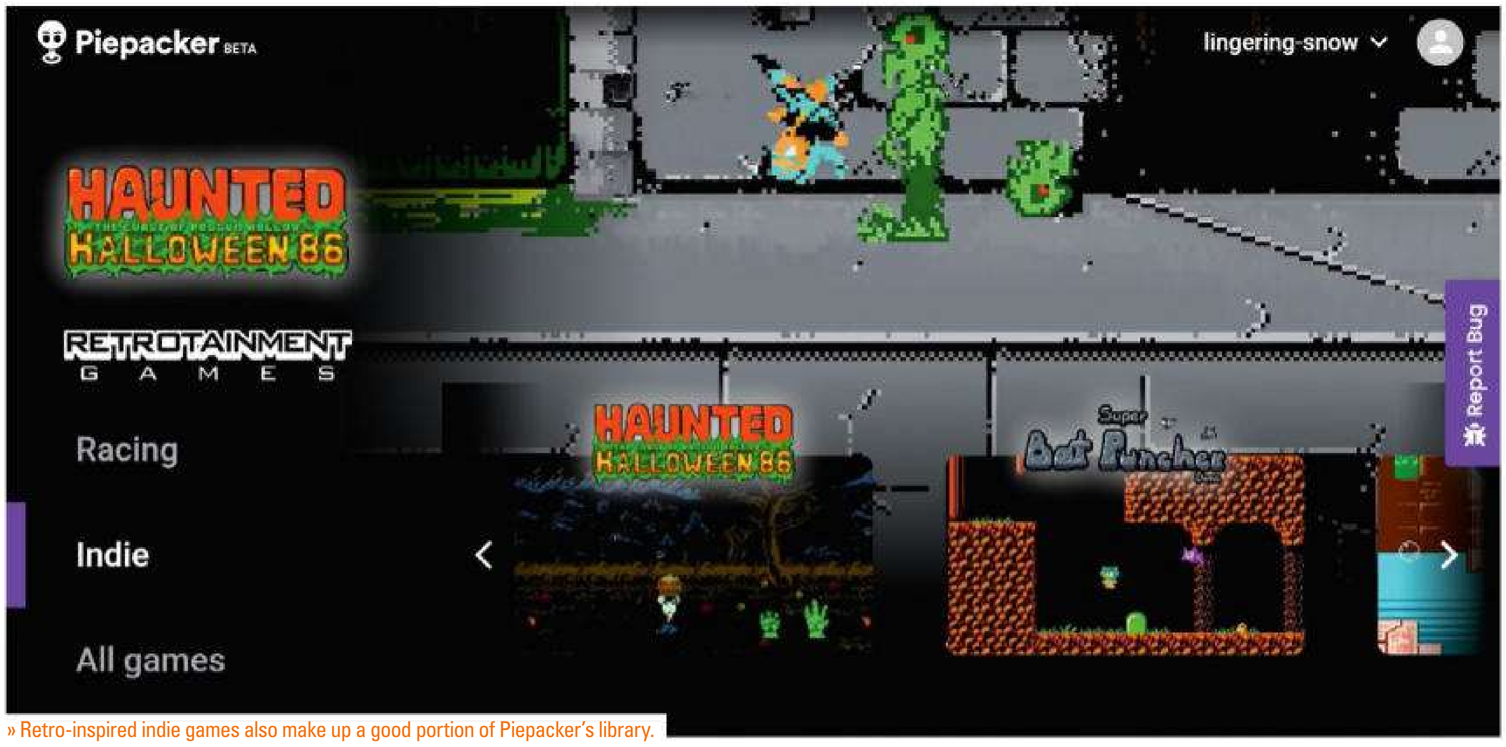
So how are you making money from it?

We offer a premium membership to basically get the ability to bring your own game. We know that people have their favourite game from their childhood that we won't be able to get on the platform, and that they would love to share with their friends and use the multiplayer mechanism that we have, so they can chat and enjoy the game with their friends. We also sell AR 3D mask filters based on the licences that we own. They're also a fantastic way to break

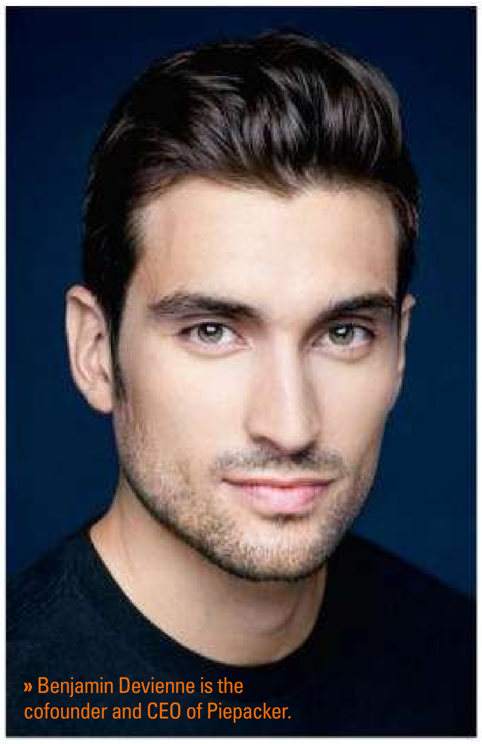


» Benjamin believes in making Piepacker exclusives like Arsène Lupin that is tailored to the community.

» The PieReader is one way users can bring their own cartridge games to the platform, although this is exclusive to Kickstarter backers.



» Retro-inspired indie games also make up a good portion of Piepacker's library.



» Benjamin Devienne is the cofounder and CEO of Piepacker.

the ice. Maybe I'm not comfortable with the way I look or maybe I don't want to show my face to my friend this morning for any reason. Having a mask helps people feel more comfortable in a virtual space, and to be more inclusive.

As a platform to play 'free and legal' retro games with friends, how do you ensure ROMs being shared are legit?

We ask people to pay a subscription for a personal private space, so you have the responsibility for what you bring to this personal space. Piepacker does not allow you to share the ROM with anybody, what you will share is the video stream. It's just broadcasting, like Twitch, except here you can control and track the stream directly. This is a very important distinction because this entire legality of what you're doing needs to be private use where you will assign terms of use. Piepacker is a pipe that allows you to broadcast video to another user and this other user is capable of controlling the game. We worked a lot with our legal counsel to create a safe environment but also keep a good relationship with our licensors like Team 17 and Codemasters, who also have relationships with platform holders like Nintendo and Sega – we owe them to do things fair and square.

How many more games do you plan to add to Piepacker?

When we survey our users, they come back not for the games necessarily but for their friends, and this is a very important distinction. The content matters less in terms of what we do, but the content still matters. So we will expand the number of licences, we're in close talks with publishers like Sega – I'm not saying they will join the party but we are having a conversation, which is a good first step. We however do not intend to become the back catalogue of retro games, so if people want to bring a very specific game, they can subscribe to bring their own game.

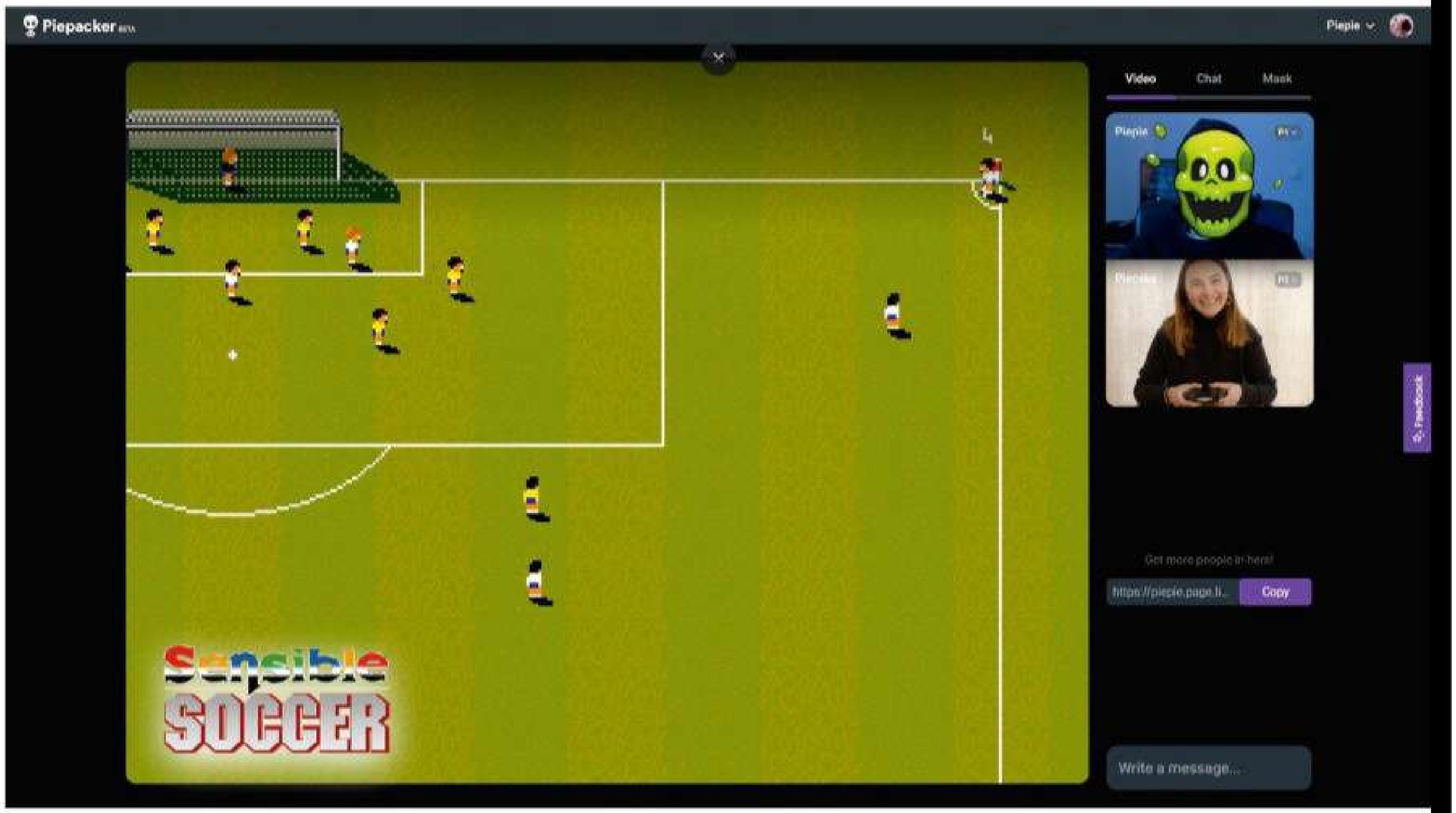
What counts as 'retro' on Piepacker and what else are you covering?

Right now, retro for us is what's concretely working on the platform, games that range from the NES to the PlayStation, but we are working towards PS2, GameCube and Dreamcast. But there is also a matter of what is legally doable. For instance, the Genesis patents expired in 2014, so we have a lot of flexibility with emulating this. For other devices, the situation might differ. So we are extremely careful about this because we are a clean business and we do things fair and square. I don't think retro gaming is going to be the only thing you find on Piepacker. We're expanding to board games, because I also think D&D, Monopoly and card games fit very well, because people just want to hang out together while playing a game.

We also believe a lot in the indie scene. We see *Micro Mages* and *Xeno Crisis*, but I want more of these. We're working on Unity and other engines directly in Piepacker so they can benefit from all the social API, all the social features and ecosystem directly for their games so we definitely want to expand the definition of which type of game we want on the platform. We also care about creating our own content. Our internal studio just finished our first game, a *Bomberman*-style game in the universe of Arsène Lupin.

Does Piepacker feel quite timely in a COVID-19 world?

COVID-19 has been a period of slow down for investment so I think it's actually made things harder. But I think the concept of Piepacker would still have been similar in a non-COVID-19 world. For instance, most of my friends from college live really far away from me and I love playing with them. Pandemic or not, I can't travel 200 miles to go and meet them, so it still makes a lot of sense. Early on in the life of Piepacker, we already had companies reaching out to us to ask for Piepacker as a virtual arcade for after-work meetings instead of just Zoom, because it's just more fun. ✱



» AR mask filters add another degree of fun, not to mention a way for Piepacker to monetise the platform.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

SEPTEMBER 2004 – News about new hardware might be thin on the ground this month, but we've got Vin Diesel and psychics to tide you over. Oh, and the return of a little-known game called Doom. Nick Thorpe hops in the time machine to tell you all about it…

NEWS SEPTEMBER 2004

On 1 September, a school in the Russian town of Beslan was occupied by Chechen separatists, with over 1,100 people taken captive – 777 of them children. The separatists demanded that Russia withdraw from Chechnya and recognise it as an independent state. Two days later, the situation escalated as a fire broke out in the school's gym, eventually killing around 160 people, before Russian forces stormed the school.

The TV music competition *The X Factor* made its debut on ITV1 on 4 September, with solo artists and groups competing for the prize of a £1 million recording contract. Simon Cowell was joined by Sharon Osbourne and Louis Walsh, and they awarded the prize to Steve Brookstein. While ratings were lower than *Pop Idol*'s second series, the show has become successful and launched the careers of Little Mix, JLS, One Direction, Olly Murs and Jedward.

Fathers 4 Justice member Jason Hatch scaled Buckingham Palace on 13 September, while dressed as Batman. As part of his protest, arguably the most audacious of the group's publicity stunts, he unfurled a banner and remained on a ledge for many hours. Hatch was arrested upon descending, but later released without charge. No members of the royal family were present at the time, but the protester's ability to gain access to the property prompted a review of royal security arrangements.

DOOM 3
36 935

[PC] Too *Doom*, or not *Doom* enough? PC Gamer felt that the former was the more accurate assessment.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 2004

As it turns out, the return of one of gaming's biggest hits is bound to drum up a little interest – and so it goes that *Doom 3* earned not only the cover of *PC Gamer*, but an eight-page review. "*Doom 3* does not have *Thief*'s gripping stealth, nor *Half-Life*'s setpiece majesty, nor *Far Cry*'s breathtaking scope and variety," the reviewer wrote. "You have a shotgun, and a chainsaw, and a plasma gun. You must destroy." Despite this simplicity, it was noted that "individual elements are excellent, almost without exception", but that the game was "best consumed in small portions" so as not to highlight "the repetitious nature of the overall design". The game was awarded 90%, but with the caveat that, "In 1994, we said of *Doom II*: 'It's *Doom* all over again, but with more of everything that made it great in the first place.' That's still true, but today's it's as much a word of caution as of recommendation."

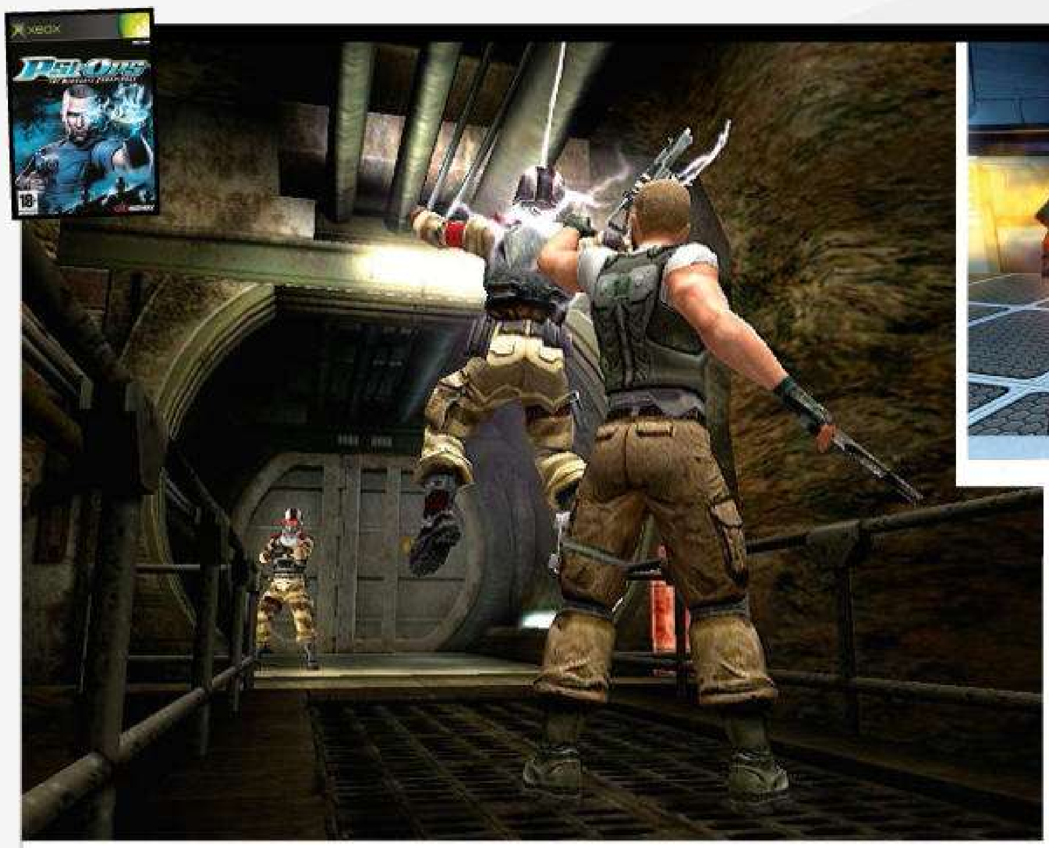
Elsewhere on the PC, *Edge* felt that while MMOs had abandoned the complexity of *Ultima Online* and become focused on "the simple joys of hitting things to get stronger to be able to hit stronger things", *City Of Heroes* was the best example of this done right. The game was awarded 8/10, with the review noting that, "It's one of the few games of its type you can actually play for an hour, take on one of its missions, and have a meaningful unit of experience."

Two of the better console exclusives of the month were to be found on the Xbox. Rather than being a direct adaptation of the film released in the summer, *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* served as a prequel to the series' original film *Pitch Black*. *Official Xbox Magazine* praised the first-person adventure for its mix of armed and unarmed combat, noting that "just when you start to tire of stealth kills and yearn for a weapon in your hands, along comes a guard with an un-encoded, and very inviting shotgun to have some fun with". That, combined with "an intriguing plot and various sub-missions", earned it a score of 9.0/10. *Edge* wasn't quite as impressed and scored the game 7/10, applauding the game for being "confident and independent", but complaining of poor pacing and a simulated prison life that "does wonders for the suspension of disbelief" yet failed to

[Xbox] Riddick has to be kept out of the sunlight – or at least, Vin Diesel has to wear sunglasses.

PlayStation.2
SECOND SIGHT

[PS2] *Second Sight* was a very original and well-regarded shooter, featuring a protagonist with psychic powers.



[Xbox] *Psi-Ops* was a very original and well-regarded shooter, featuring a protagonist with psychic powers. [Lol - Ed]

[PC] Now we think about it, could you create a superhero with psychic powers in *City Of Heroes*?

CRYGR
JIMMY
Survive!
MONA

[GameCube] No psychics to be seen here, just multiplayer mayhem of the usual *Wario Ware* style.

be fun. Also, *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow* earned 9.0/10 from *OXM*. The standalone mission disc's £20 price tag undoubtedly factored into the score, with the magazine proclaiming that "in terms of value for money, you won't find more bang for your buck".

Over on the GameCube, *Wario Ware, Inc: Mega Party Games* offered the fast paced micro-game fun of the Game Boy Advance original, but with a multiplayer twist. The game earned a score of 90% from *NGC*, which described it as "outlandishly quirky and good fun into the bargain". *NGC* also awarded 90% to Free Radical's psychic-themed shooter *Second Sight* – a game which also earned 8.1/10 from *OXM* and 8/10 from *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*. *OXM* complained of an "erratic stealth element" but felt that the "psychic powers are brilliantly implemented". *OPM* further praised it, feeling that it offered "a great story told with class, style and beautiful looks".

GameCube owners only had one choice for psychic shooting shenanigans, but PS2 and Xbox owners had an alternative in the form of Midway's *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*. "*Second Sight* is the more cerebral choice," said *OPM*, contrasting it with its competitor. "Prefer big action? You *know* what to do, right?" Like *Second Sight*, *Psi-Ops* scored 8/10. OXM preferred Midway's game, scoring it 8.6/10 and claiming that despite "a plot twist so predictable that even WWE scriptwriters would cringe" the game was "spectacular fun and easily the most inventive third-person shooter to date". One area the game excelled in was AI, and it seemed that other developers could learn something from that – particularly Capcom. *Resident Evil Outbreak* arrived on the PS2 this month, stripped of the online gameplay that was possible in other regions, leaving players to rely on what *OPM* called the "unsteady support" of "blundering AI". Despite that, the magazine felt that the classic *Resident Evil* formula still had merit, awarding it 7/10.

Handheld gamers were well served with the arrival of *Fire Emblem* on the Game Boy Advance, which scored 92% in *NGC*. The reviewer felt that the game "has a lot more personality than *Advance Wars*", due to the use of individual characters with their own sub-stories, and the potential to permanently lose them. The multiplayer platformer *Kirby And The Amazing Mirror* was slightly less good, scoring 78% for being attractive and fun, but with the note that, "There aren't really enough puzzles or gameplay mechanics that exploit the four Kirbies simultaneously…"

Join us again next month, when we'll be mourning the closures of both a controversial publisher and a legendary games magazine. *

CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 2004

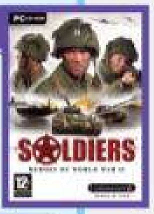
PLAYSTATION 2

1 – Spider-Man 2 (Activision)
2 – Driv3r (Atari)
3 – Athens 2004 (Sony)
4 – Shrek 2 (Activision)
5 – Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (Ubisoft)

XBOX

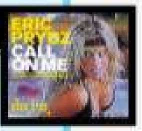
1 – Spider-Man 2 (Activision)
2 – Driv3r (Atari)
3 – Full Spectrum Warrior (THQ)
4 – Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (Ubisoft)
5 – Shrek 2 (Activision)

PC



1 – Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII (Codemasters)
2 – Championship Manager 03/04 (Eidos)
3 – Joint Operations (Novalogic)
4 – Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus (Vivendi)
5 – The Sims (EA)

MUSIC

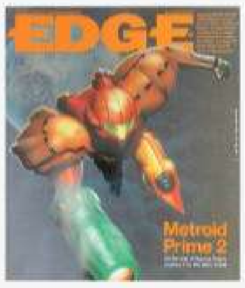


1 – Call On Me (Eric Prydz)
2 – Love Machine (Girls Aloud)
3 – American Idiot (Green Day)
4 – My Place/Flap Your Wings (Nelly)
5 – Leave (Get Out) (Jojo)

THIS MONTH IN…

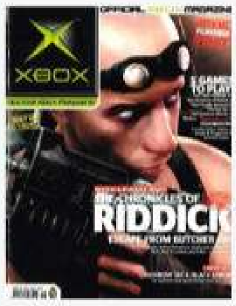
NGC

"Will Revolution be as different from PS3 and Xbox 2 as DS is from PSP?" That's the question *NGC* is asking, as it ponders whether Nintendo is withdrawing from the hardware arms race. "Maybe Revolution will be so different from their machines that ports will no longer be possible for it – *only* exclusive titles will be possible."



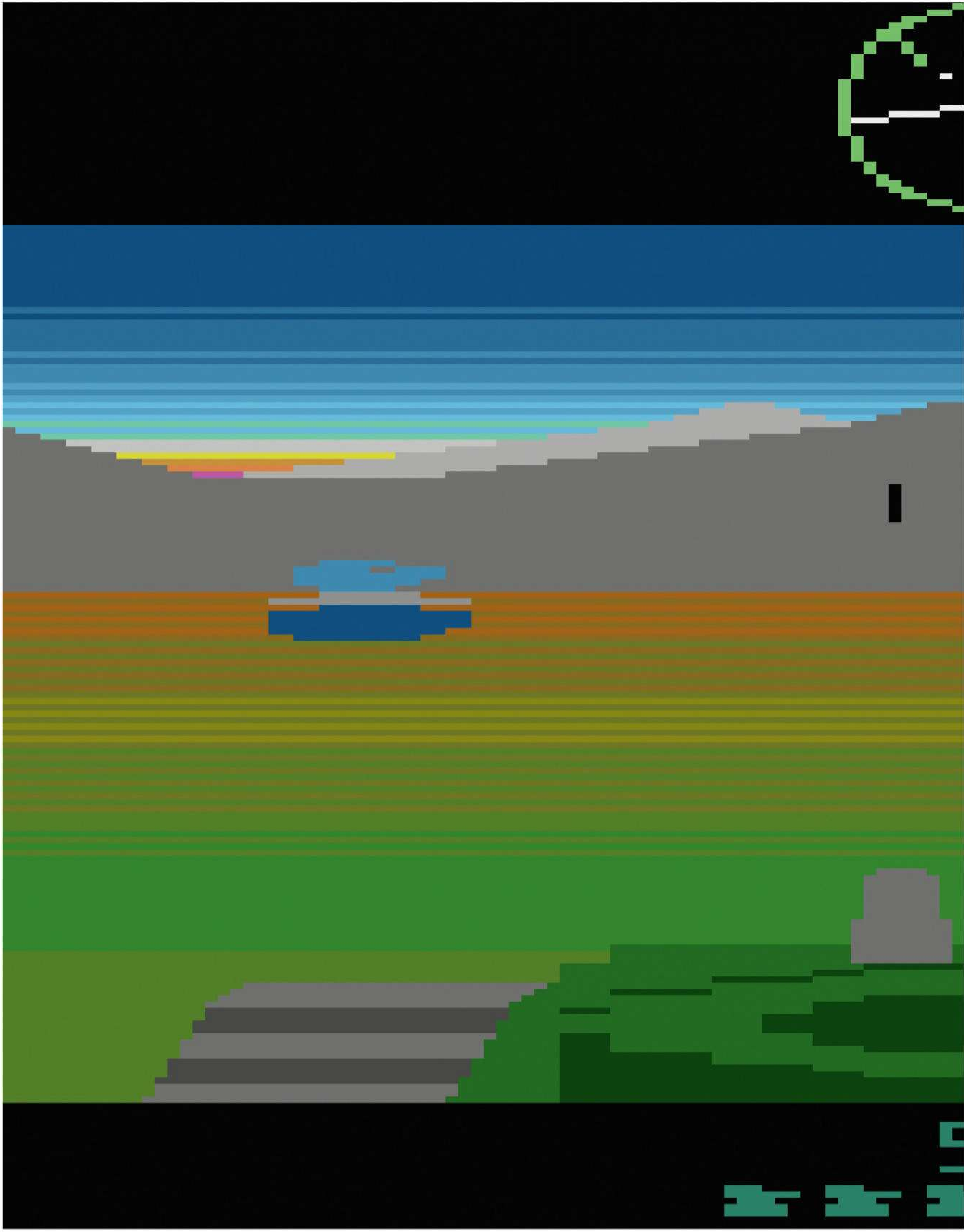
Edge

In a move that threatens to soften the "pouts of hardcore gamers" Ignition Entertainment has signed a deal to bring various SNK games to Europe. "SNK fans will have long found themselves resorting to import," notes *Edge*. "Ignition's market must come from persuading the mainstream that there's entertainment in classic franchises."



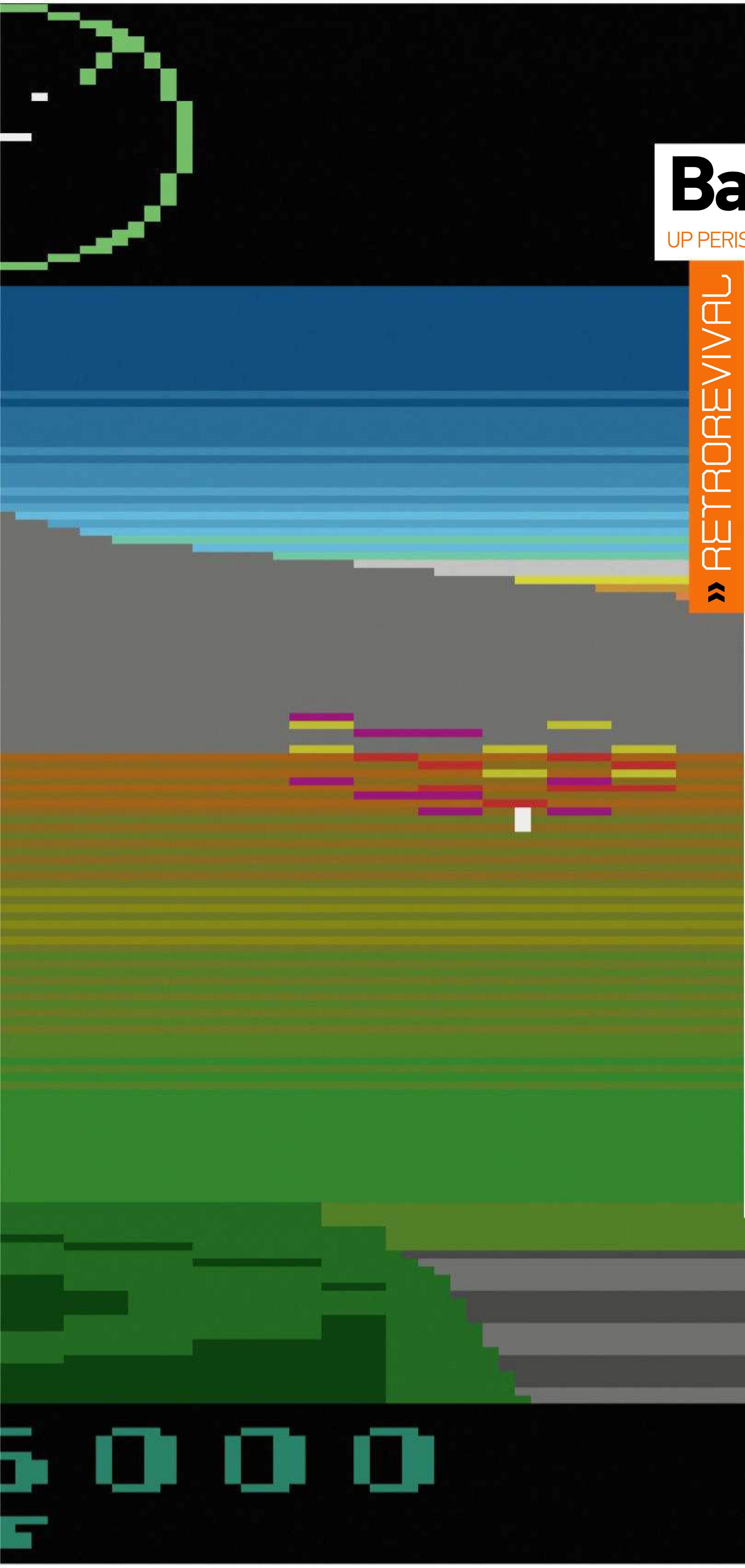
Official Xbox Magazine

OXM reports that Microsoft's first 'Rare Day' event in London featured *Conker: Live & Reloaded*. But it was also showing *Kameo: Elements Of Power*, still in development over three years after its initial announcement. "The Xbox is definitely a jump ahead of the GameCube," says senior designer George Andreas.



Battlezone

UP PERISCOPE!



» Atari 2600 » 1983 » Atari Inc

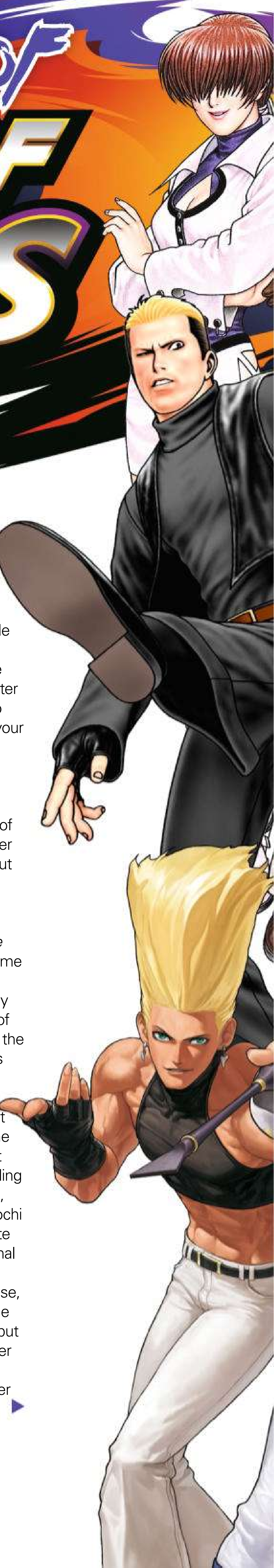
Atari's *Battlezone* absolutely floored me when I discovered it on a holiday trip to Porthcawl. The Welsh seaside resort was absolutely swamped with different arcades and virtually every hit game could be found there. *Battlezone* instantly caught my attention, not just because of its huge dual joysticks, but also due to its stylish vector graphics. I remember my granddad lifting me up so I could use the periscope viewfinder and I had a thrilling couple of minutes grappling with the controls and taking down tanks until my granddad's arms gave out and he had to put me down. I returned many times to Atari's game over the following week, using a handy stool to reach the periscope.

A couple of years after my trip to Wales, I discovered the Atari 2600 version of the game on my friend's console and it once again impressed me. Granted, it looked nowhere near as good as the arcade original due to its rather chunky visuals and the controls weren't as nicely refined, but it still managed to capture the essence of Atari's arcade machine, even if you could see your tank on-screen. One of the things I loved about the arcade game was the cat and mouse nature of its mechanics and the tenseness that arose when a tank finally trailed you and fired off a shot and you desperately tried to avoid it, by either outmanoeuvring it or hiding behind a suitable structure.

Many of those same mechanics worked for the console version and while it was certainly harder to avoid those incoming shells compared to the arcade original, it still managed to give you a similar adrenalin rush and proved that while Atari's console might not be able to completely match its arcade parent, it could still deliver plenty of thrills. In fact, for me dying was actually an improvement over the arcade game because rather than a huge crack appearing on the screen, you were instead treated to an impressive distortion effect which simulated electrical interference. Yes it was easier than the arcade game and yes it lacked its stylish aesthetics but it still managed to impress me as a wide-eyed child. What a pity it never made it onto the recent Evercade cartridges. I'd love to own it again. ✱

THE EVOLUTION OF THE KING OF FIGHTERS

WORDS BY NICK THORPE AND DARRAN JONES



SNK'S MAGNIFICENT CROSSOVER SERIES HAS BEEN ENTERTAINING FIGHTING FANS SINCE 1994. AS THE STUDIO CONTINUES WORK ON THE 15TH INSTALMENT OF THE BELOVED FRANCHISE, WE QUIZZED YASUYUKI ODA AND EISUKE OGURA ABOUT THE MANY ELEMENTS THAT HAVE DEFINED THE SERIES

The success of *Street Fighter II* saw a number of arcade developers move into the genre, in an attempt to wrestle the fighting crown from Capcom. One of the most successful studios to break Capcom's stranglehold was SNK. It launched a strong uppercut against *Street Fighter II* thanks to the release of *Fatal Fury: King Of Fighters* in 1991, which was overseen by *Street Fighter*'s original creator Takashi Nishiyama.

Finding success with the game, SNK delivered a string of successful counters over the following years, including a sequel to *Fatal Fury*, *Art Of Fighting* and *Samurai Shodown*. In short, if the studio couldn't topple Capcom's brawler in a one-on-one battle, it could at least overpower its competitor through sheer diversity.

Street Fighter II's popularity stayed strong throughout the early Nineties, with Capcom cannibalising its own CPS arcade boards and releasing numerous revisions in order to meet the voracious demand for its venerated fighter. It was becoming obvious that SNK wasn't going to bring down the behemoth so it did the next best thing, it pivoted and delivered a knockout blow of its own…

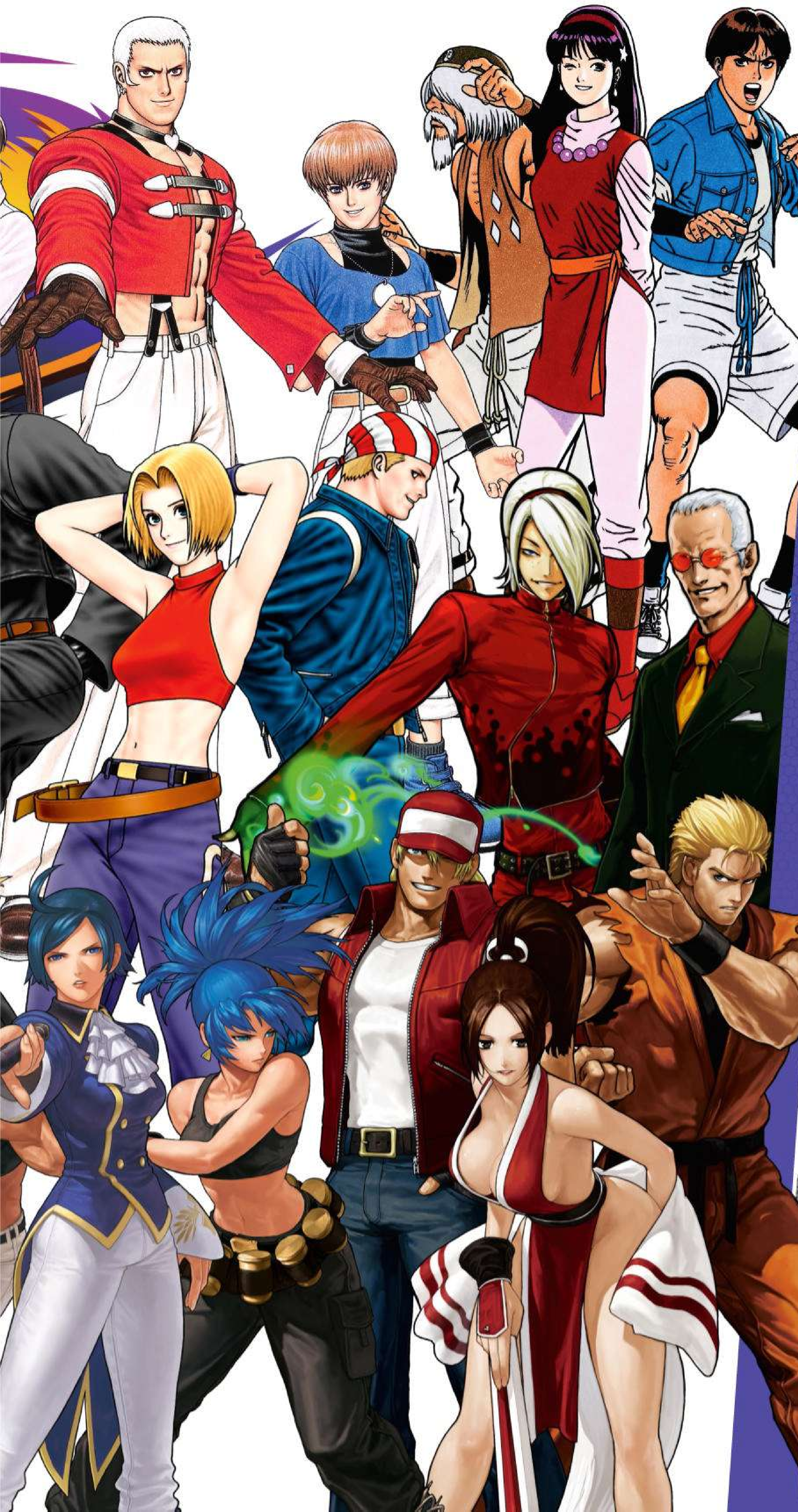
The King Of Fighters was notable on release not just because it featured characters from earlier SNK games, including *Fatal Fury* and *Ikari Warriors*, but also because it focused on team-based play. The diverse cast of 24 playable characters spread across eight teams means there's an equally eclectic range of fighting styles to master. Matches also play out differently because SNK turned its back on the standard best of three matches that had dominated the genre and introduced the innovative 'Team Battle System'. Upon choosing a team you decide the order in which your teammates will fight and then keep going until only one team is left standing. In a nice touch, a small amount of energy is restored to your fighter upon defeating an opposing character so it's possible to best an opposing team without even having to rely on your fighter's teammates.

Another mechanic featured in *The King Of Fighters* is the ability to charge your character's Power Gauge by holding down specific buttons. Filling the gauge means your base attacks become stronger for a short amount of time and it's even possible to pull off a devastating Super Move (at the expense of depleting your entire gauge) but the trade-off is that you're completely vulnerable while charging, creating a neat risk vs reward system.

Despite arriving in late 1994, *The King Of Fighters* made an immediate impact in Japanese arcades. *Game Machine* ranked it as the second best earning 'table' game in its first two weeks on sale, meaning it lost ground to Sega's impressive and ground-breaking *Virtua Fighter*. By the year's end it ranked as the fifth best earning game of 1994. Granted, Capcom's *Super Street Fighter II X* took the top spot but it did have a full six-month start over SNK's game so it remains an impressive debut.

The success of *The King Of Fighters* meant a sequel was inevitable with *The King Of Fighters '95* arriving just over a year after its predecessor. It largely kept the same formula as before but made a few notable changes that have endured throughout the series' later games, including the introduction of Iori Yagami as a foil for Kyo Kusanagi, the first hints of an overarching story known as the 'Orochi Saga' and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to create a custom team, which had been missing from the original game and was greatly criticised in reviews.

SNK's series has continued to evolve with each release, pulling in characters from other SNK franchises along the way, occasionally revisiting earlier games in the series, but always staying true to its arcade roots. While it has never quite escaped the reach of *Street Fighter* many fighting fans consider it to be just as important and we'll discover how that happened over the following pages.

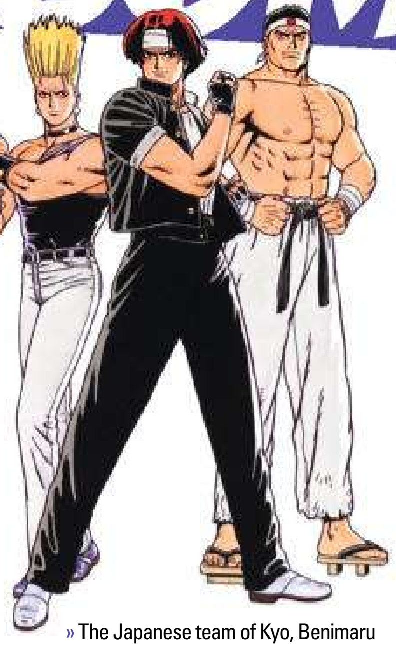


YASUYUKI ODA
is a lead producer at SNK and has worked on numerous fighting games, including *The King Of Fighters*, *Street Fighter X Tekken* and Super *Street Fighter IV*.

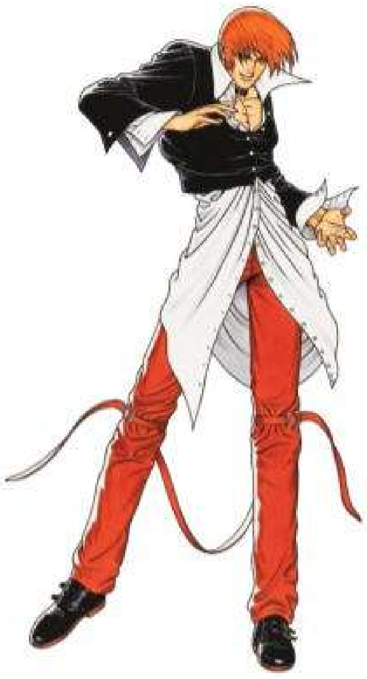
EISUKE OGURA
wears many hats and is currently the director, main illustrator and character designer for *The King Of Fighters XV*.

CHARISMATIC COMBATANTS

BETWEEN ITS CROSSOVER STARS AND ITS ORIGINAL CAST, THE KING OF FIGHTERS WOULD BE NOTHING WITHOUT ITS CHARACTERS – AND WE MEAN THAT QUITE LITERALLY



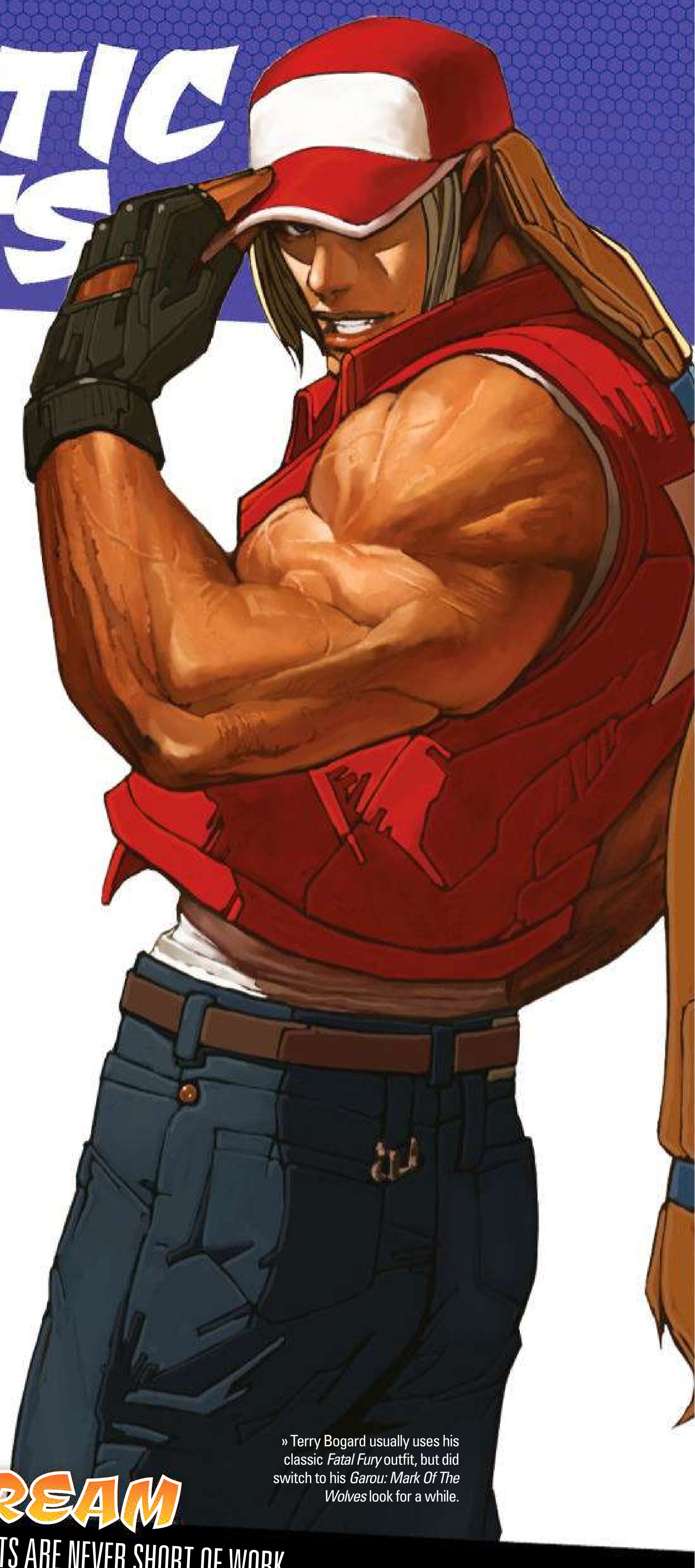
» The Japanese team of Kyo, Benimaru and Daimon was created specifically as a heroic team for *The King Of Fighters '94*.



» Kyo's rival Iori has a very distinctive character design, and is one of the series' most popular characters.

It's no exaggeration to say that characters are at the heart of *The King Of Fighters* series. Well before the first game in the series had its name, even before it was a team-based fighting game, it had its character concepts. The series has its roots in a pitch called 'Survivor', a scrolling beat-'em-up that would have united the stars of the *Fatal Fury* and *Art Of Fighting* series. Though that never came to pass, the concept of a crossover between SNK's popular characters remained, and became *The King Of Fighters '94*. The first game in the series featured plenty of characters from those two popular fighting game series, but also drew on SNK's history, with teams featuring the heroes of *Ikari Warriors* and *Psycho Soldier* too. There were even original characters – the American sports team and the heroic Japanese team, led by series protagonist Kyo Kusanagi, as well as the infamous final boss Rugal Bernstein.

The concept was a new one for players in Japanese arcades, and according to the series' lead producer Yasuyuki Oda, "It made a huge impact with them and was pretty popular." This paved the way for sequels that expanded the concept, with new characters and crossover characters added in balance. According to Oda, "Things like action, looks, backbone, gameplay, etc are all taken into consideration," when creating or adding a new character to the roster. One of the most important early additions came in *The King Of Fighters '95*, which ditched the sports team and imported Billy Kane and Eiji Kisaragi to serve as teammates for Iori Yagami, Kyo's eternal rival. The conflict between Kyo and Iori was central to the first story of *The King Of Fighters* series, as the servants of an ancient god named Orochi attempted to remove the seal that kept it from destroying humanity. "*KOF* was a true breath of fresh air for the fighting game scene as it was truly unique and featured amazing characters," says Oda. "The lore and setting has a lot of traditional Japanese references, and though some parts may feel very foreign to people overseas, the way the story incorporates Japanese mythology like Orochi and the Three Sacred Treasures was done very well."

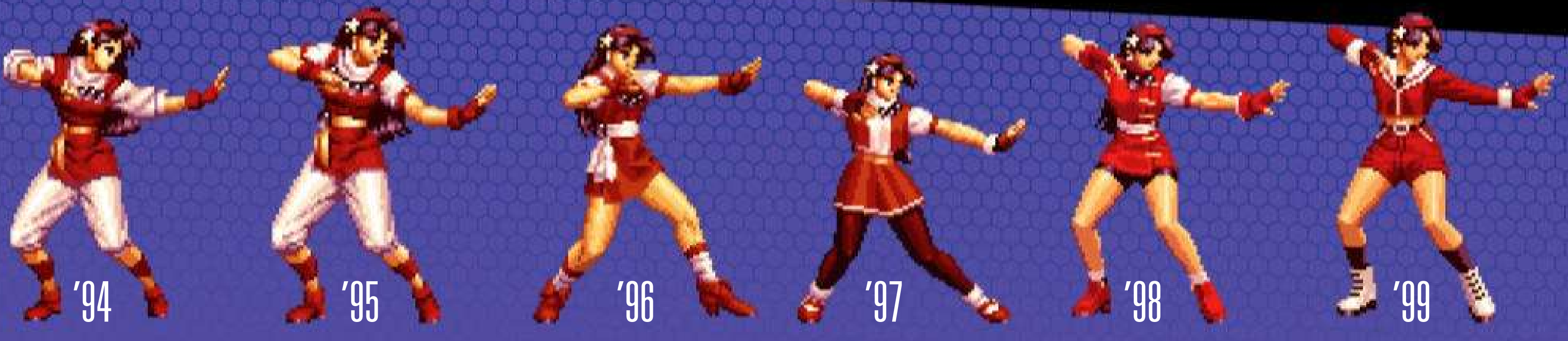


» Terry Bogard usually uses his classic *Fatal Fury* outfit, but did switch to his *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* look for a while.

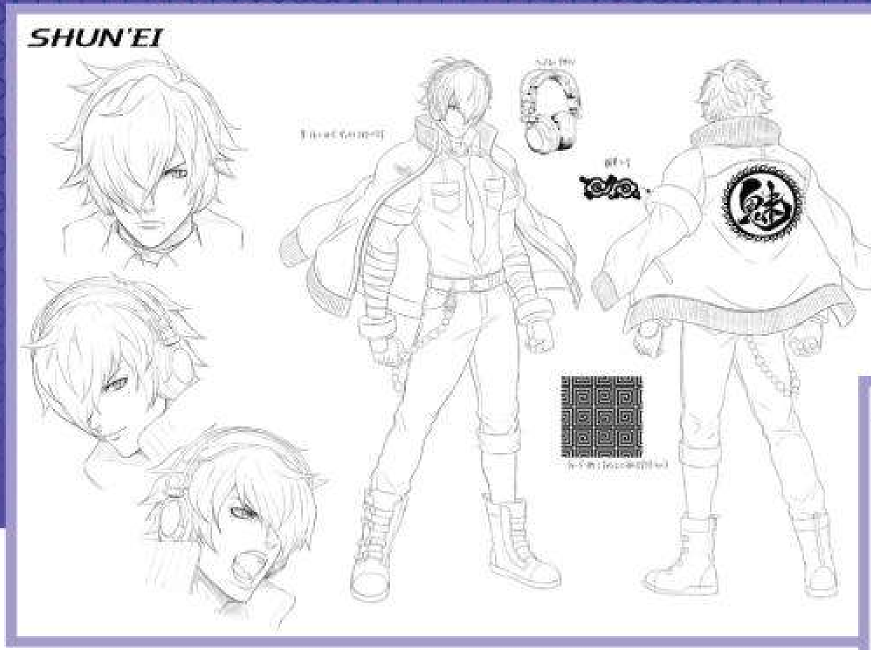
THE DESIGNER'S DREAM

THE KING OF FIGHTERS CHARACTER THAT ENSURES SPRITE ARTISTS ARE NEVER SHORT OF WORK

Of all the characters in *The King Of Fighters*, it's fair to say that Athena receives the most design attention. Every game sees the popular face of the Psycho Soldier team redesigned, whether it's a simple shortening of her sleeves or a radical haircut, and her appearances over the years have emphasised her qualities as a pop idol, superhero and even just a regular schoolgirl. Which of her looks is your favourite?



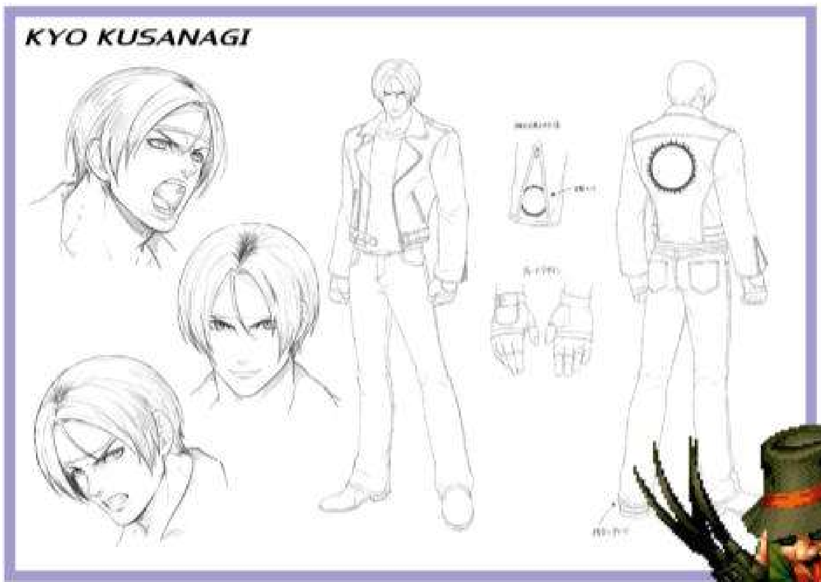
> “IN FIGHTING GAMES, EACH CHARACTER IS THEIR OWN PROTAGONIST, AND SO NOT HAVING THEM APPEAR IN THE NEXT GAME TENDS TO DISAPPOINT MANY PEOPLE.”
>
> **Yasuyuki Oda**



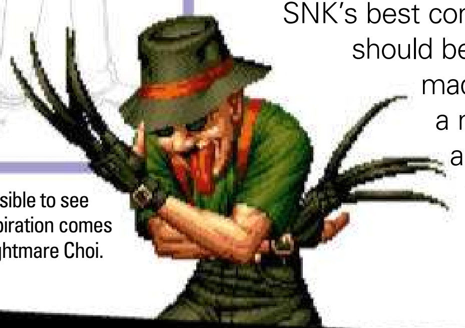
» Shun’ei has been designated the hero of the next game, and his appearance is likely to undergo major scrutiny before release.

Starting from *The King Of Fighters ’99*, a new story involving the NESTS organisation began, and focus moved to a new set of characters. Kyo and Iori were no longer available as regular characters, with the fiery K’ and hulking Maxima serving as new protagonists. This story ran through to *The King Of Fighters 2001*, and saw SNK – and Eolith, during SNK’s financial troubles – mainly opting to add new characters, with only Li Xiangfei flying the crossover flag. But the focus on incorporating the wider SNK world returned in the *King Of Fighters 2003*, which introduced Gato and Tizoc from *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* as well as a brand-new protagonist, Ash Crimson. Ash’s story would continue through *The King Of Fighters XI* and *XIII*, with more *Fatal Fury* series characters such as Duck King and Raiden added along the way.

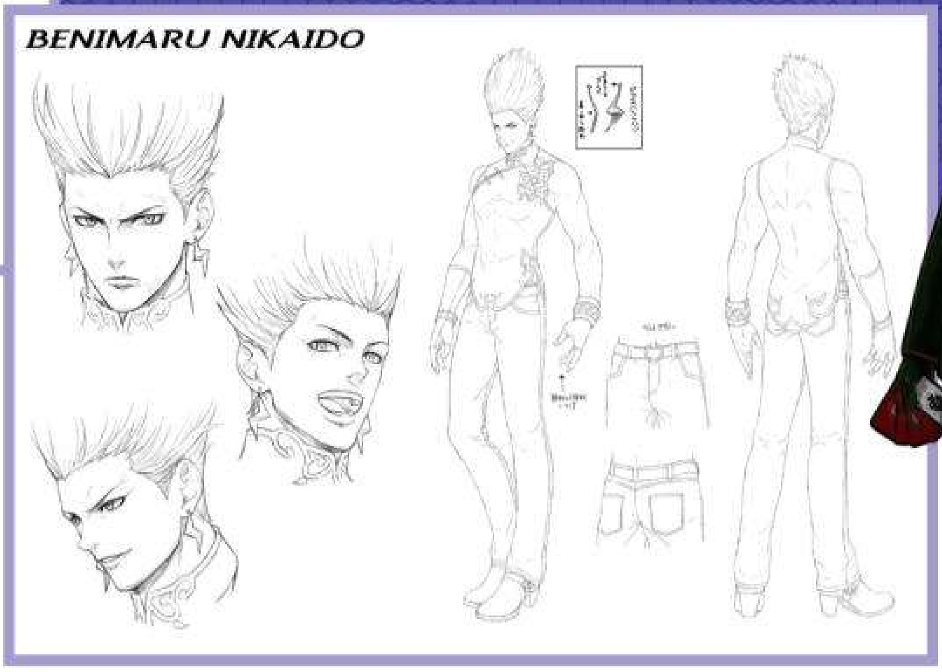
For a long time, the sprites in *The King Of Fighters ’96* were the basis for many fighters’ ongoing appearances, but many characters were reimagined with the introduction of HD graphics in *The King Of Fighters XII*. Ultimately, the cost of producing those HD sprites caused the team to finally move to 3D for *The King Of Fighters XIV* – but getting the characters to look right was not an easy process. “We had our fair share of difficulty as 2D and 3D animation couldn’t be more different. The first issue we had to resolve was finding the right ‘feel’ for the faces and textures,” says Eisuke Ogura, the director, main illustrator and character designer of *The King Of Fighters XV*. “Another issue that presented itself was how well our animators could convey exaggerated motions, for example by increasing the size of a fist on impact to sell the attack better, in a 3D environment. In terms of costs, etc, 3D is the way to go, but there are times where a character’s movements can look off. That’s why it’s extremely important that we go back and make sure each movement is as polished as can be.”



» This early set of sketches shows the concept for Kyo’s appearance in *The King Of Fighters XV*.

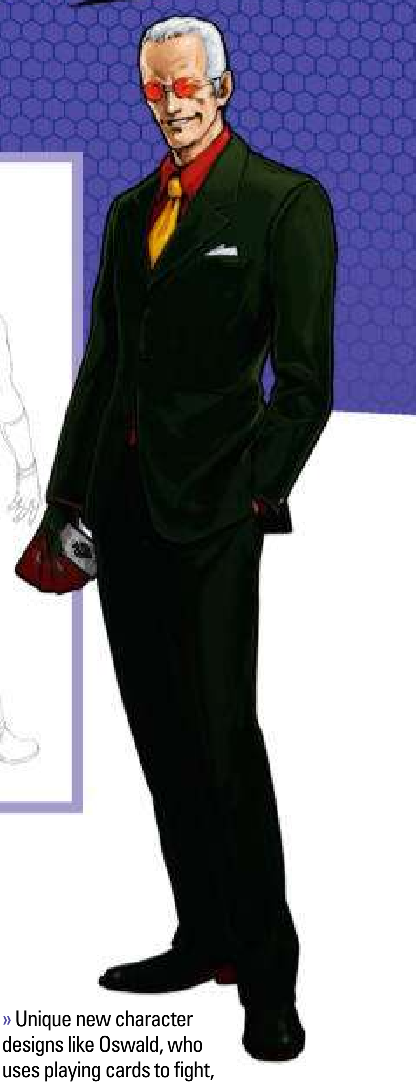


» Sometimes, it’s possible to see where a design’s inspiration comes from, as with little nightmare Choi.

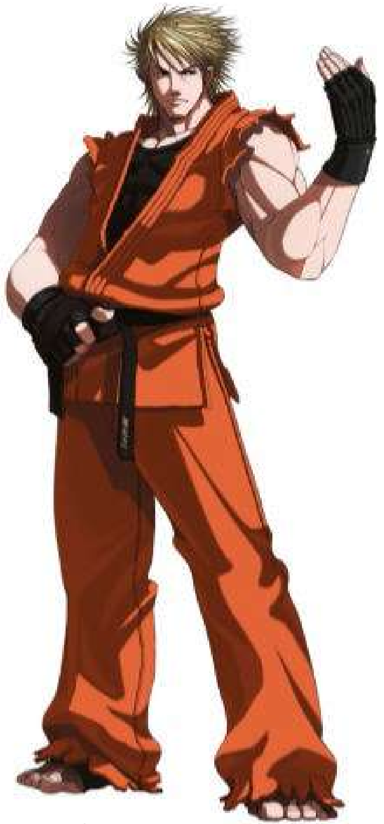


» Benimaru’s concept for the next game involves a new style taking in elements of Chinese clothing.

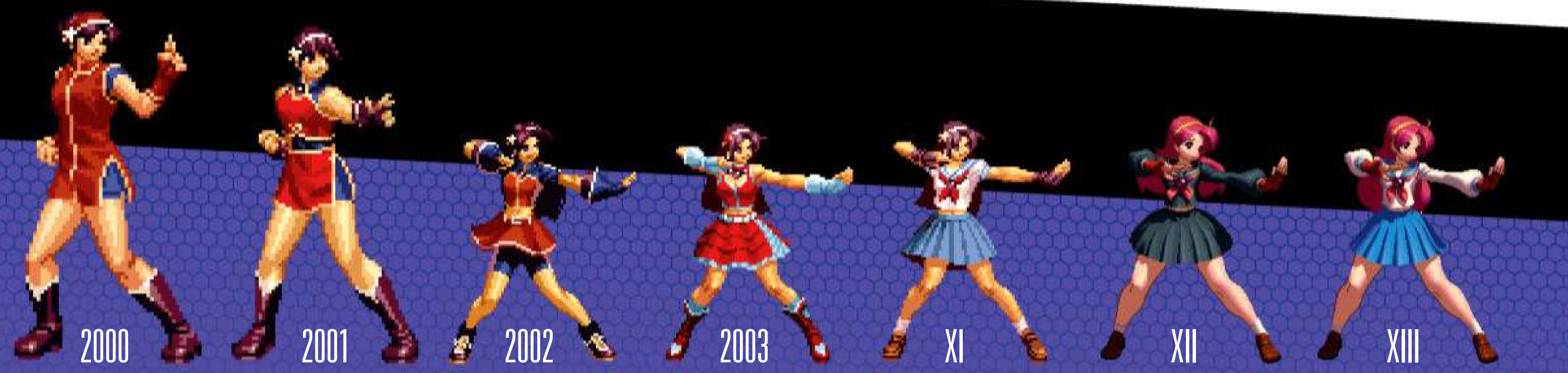
Because of the series’ focus on plot, and the need for real stakes, some characters were permanently killed off over the years. While SNK would provide *Dream Match* games like *The King Of Fighters ’98* and *2002* in order to bring back past favourite characters, this did present something of a problem for regular instalments. “In fighting games, each character is their own protagonist, and so not having them appear in the next game tends to disappoint many people. Of course, simply saying that they died in the previous game doesn’t do much to sway people’s opinion,” says Oda. “So, with that in mind, and considering the fact that *KOF* is a type of ‘all-stars’ game where SNK’s best come to duke it out, where even characters that should be dead, aren’t – I’m looking at you, Geese – it made sense to establish Verse [*KOFXIV*’s boss] as a means to bring others back.” With Verse’s time anomalies as a justification, SNK can go even further in incorporating previously unthinkable fighters like *Samurai Shodown*’s Nakoruru, without violating the series’ internal logic. ▶



» Unique new character designs like Oswald, who uses playing cards to fight, keep the series fresh.



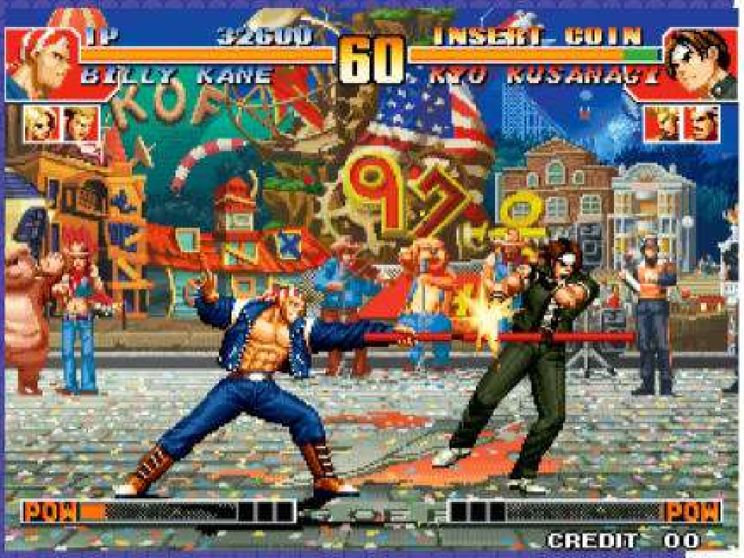
» Ryo Sakazaki is a series mainstay, alongside his *Art Of Fighting* compatriot Robert Garcia.



AWESOME ATMOSPHERE

THE KING OF FIGHTERS GAMES HAVE LONG BEEN GREAT AT SETTING A SCENE, WITH BACKGROUND ART AND MUSIC THAT ONLY ENHANCE THE COMBAT

1P-
TAKUMA SA



» [Neo Geo] The cameraman and amusement park setting show how the tournament has gone mainstream in *The King Of Fighters '97*.

» [Neo Geo] Though infrequent, cutscenes are deployed to ensure that the player is up to speed with the story.

HEIDERN
IT'S...KYO KUSANAGI!

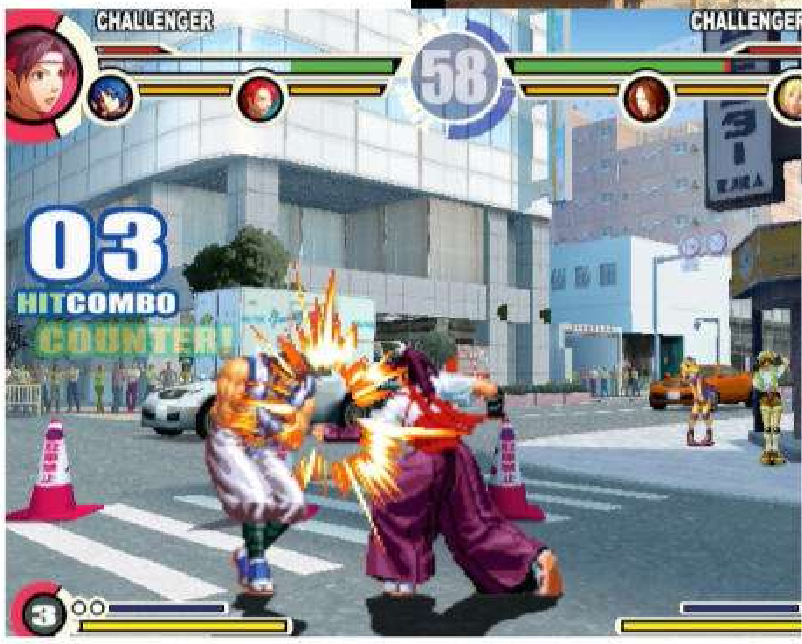
A good fight depends just as much on atmosphere as it does on the combatants themselves. Let's be honest – if you had a time machine and got Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson at their career peaks, the fight would still look comical if you held it at a Wacky Warehouse. [I'd still watch it - Ed]

No, you need a street brawl that brings traffic to a grinding halt, or a dramatic showdown on an isolated, windswept hilltop. That's why the backgrounds and musical accompaniment matter so much to *The King Of Fighters*.

It's something that Eisuke Ogura is keen to emphasise as a way to further define characters. "There are many times where just by hearing a character's theme, one can recall their playthrough with more clarity than just by visually seeing the character. It also helps the character stand out and feel more alive as the music can give what's going on in the background some real weight," he explains.

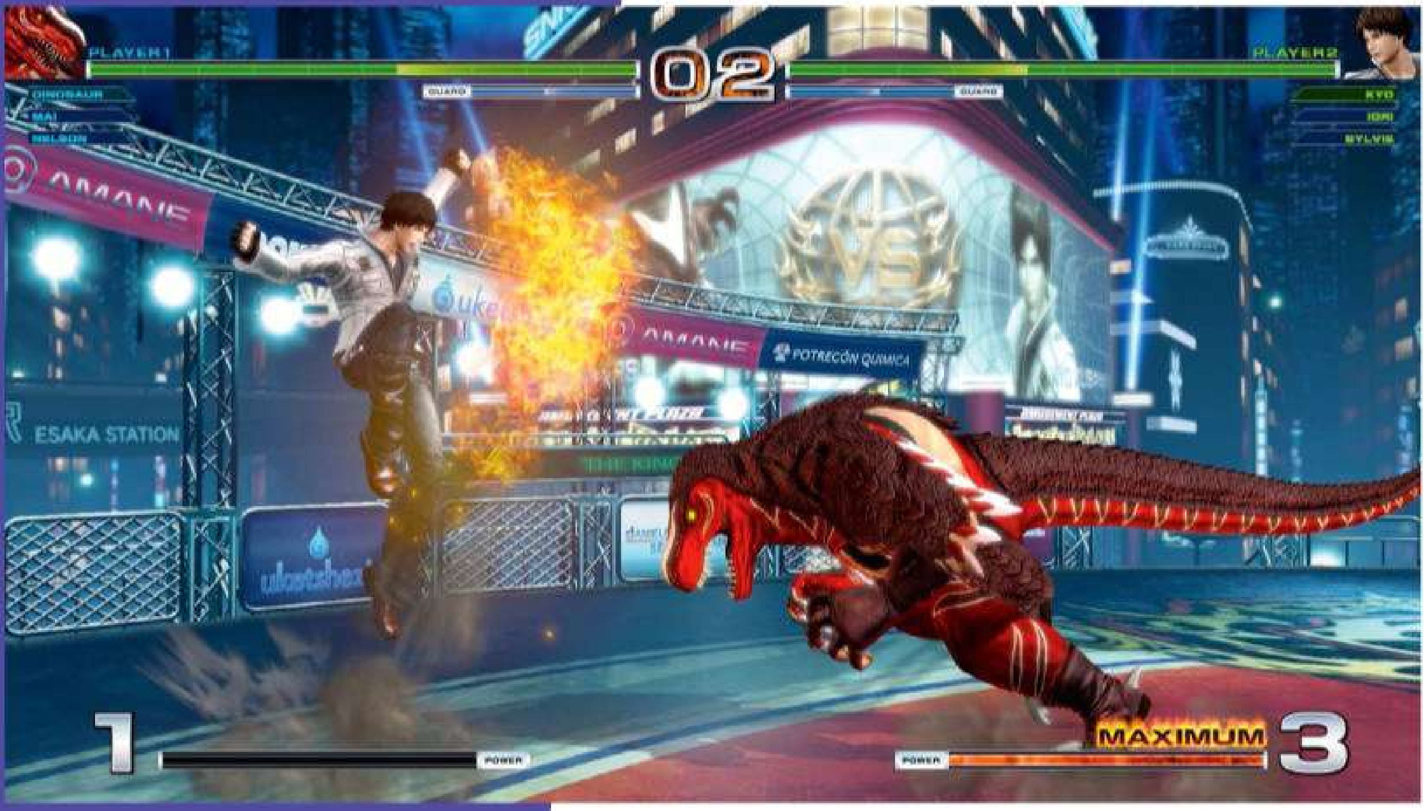
"Accurately matching the background to the track being played helps set in stone whatever emotions the player is feeling, and thus shapes their overall image of a character. That's why you can feel your heart race when listening to their theme. In a game like *The King Of Fighters* where the same characters appear many times over, this type of aspect tends to play a very important role." Yasuyuki Oda adds "For legacy characters, we try not to veer too far away from how they were portrayed in their original game." Just a quick look at the settings of the first couple of games can help you to identify with the characters, whether you're a newcomer or a veteran of SNK's previous fighting games. The Ikari team's crashed military vehicles not only show their background, but convey their ability to survive tough times. The Korean team's stark, remote training grounds emphasise Kim's hard work to rehabilitate his criminal teammates Chang and Choi. Iori's team debuts against a grimy, unkempt industrial backdrop that tells you that not only are you in the wrong part of town, but you've met the worst people possible.

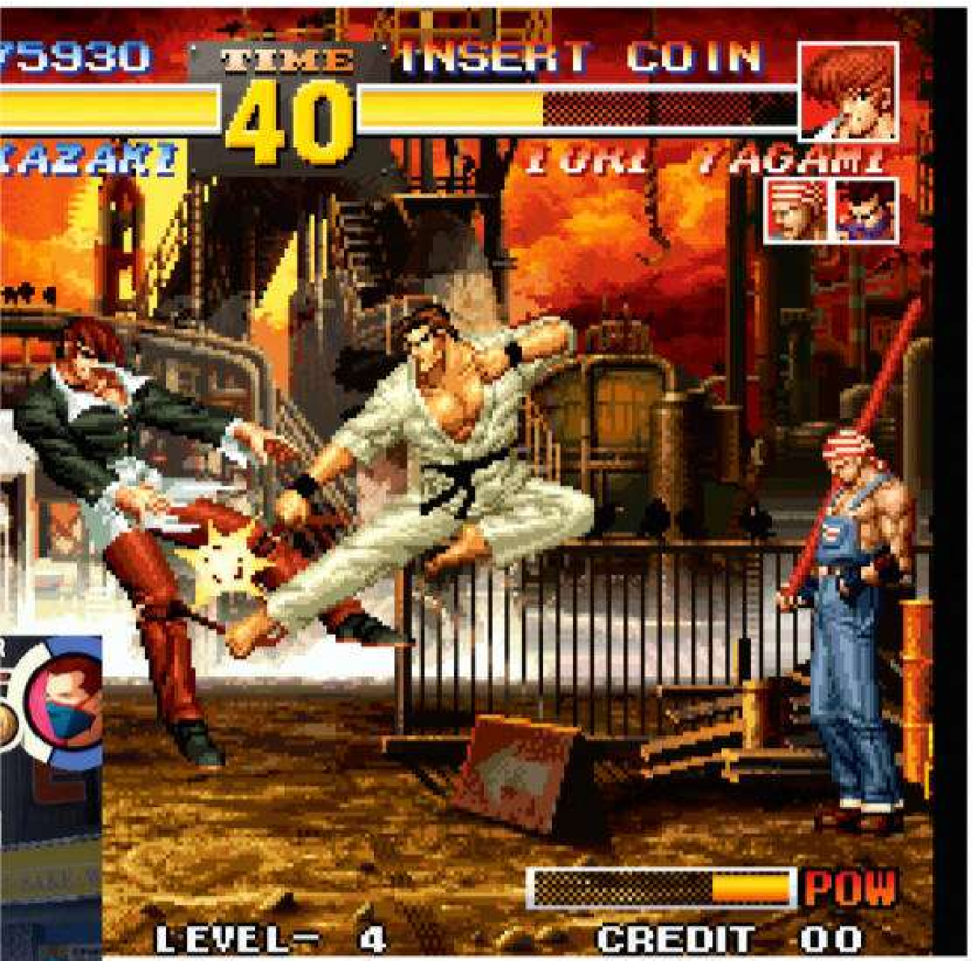
Likewise, the music succeeds in its goal of aiding the character designs. The Fatal Fury team tends to have either relaxed or upbeat themes, fitting Terry Bogard's attitude of participating to enjoy the thrill of a good fight, rather than for death or glory. In *The King Of Fighters '99*, the electronic beats of *KD-0079* signify the scientific and technological nature of the villainous NESTS syndicate, compared to the supernatural nature of Orochi, and it makes for a perfect theme for the protagonists and ex-NESTS agents K' and Maxima. Sometimes, a good musical theme is just a great way to jog the memory too. The various versions of the *Psycho Soldier* theme used by Athena Asamiya and her friends, or the return and remixing of tracks like *Soy Sauce For Geese*, immediately bring to mind the games that they originated in.



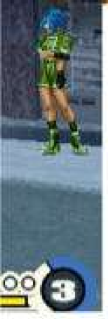
» [PS2] Background cameos are common in the series – here we can see Leona, Hinako and Bao.

» [PS4] SNK arcades, like the fictional Neo Geo Palace here, often serve as backdrops for your fights.





» [Neo Geo] Who would fight in a place like this? Grimy surroundings match the unsavoury characters.

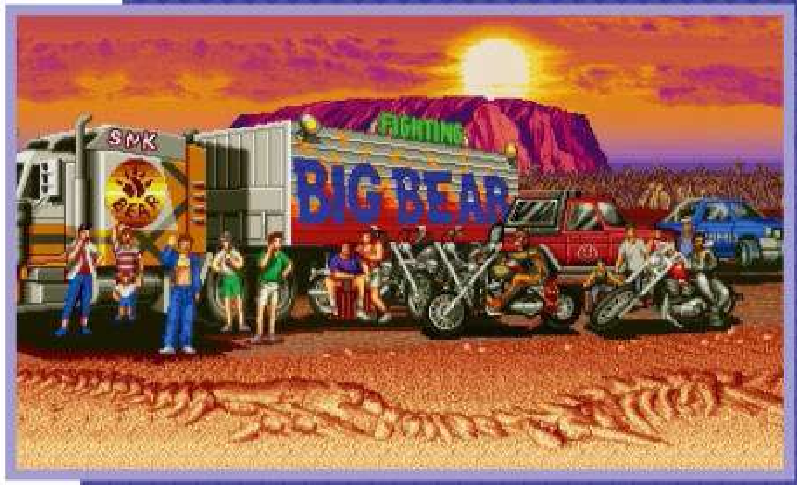


Of course, SNK hasn't shied away from trying new things with the formula. A great one was arenas that showed distinct differences between rounds, as day turned to night, traffic moved about and rain began to pour – typically, in a stage set in England. Where else? A more controversial change came in *The King Of Fighters '97*, in which traditional background music was largely discarded, with SNK instead employing ambient background sounds to match the scene – funfair fanfares, cheering crowds and even rhythmic, ritualistic drumming. Only key characters such as Kyo, Iori, Terry and Athena were allowed to retain their theme music. But the traditional approach has prevailed over time, largely due to its usefulness in conveying the character of a particular team of fighters. And, as time has gone on, the series has built up such a range of familiar locations that a background with some good callbacks can not only help to solidify a character's image, but also help anchor the game within the same universe in the minds of the fans.

"I always have a ton of fun designing the backgrounds," says Ogura. "The thought process that goes into designing a brand-new stage or recreating a past stage with deep and meaningful references differ, but are both quite enjoyable in their own different ways." As an example of the latter, he connects the very latest game in the series to the very first *Fatal Fury* game. "For Sound Beach in *The King Of Fighters XV*, we decided to develop it based off of themes and ideas pertaining to the iconic stage from *Fatal Fury* instead of simply recreating it," he tells us. "When the day came that the stage was revealed, a lot of people recognised it immediately as Sound Beach, and so if they're happy with it, then I consider the design a success." As long as the team at SNK can tell you what the characters and their world are like without words, as they always have done, we'd consider that a success too.

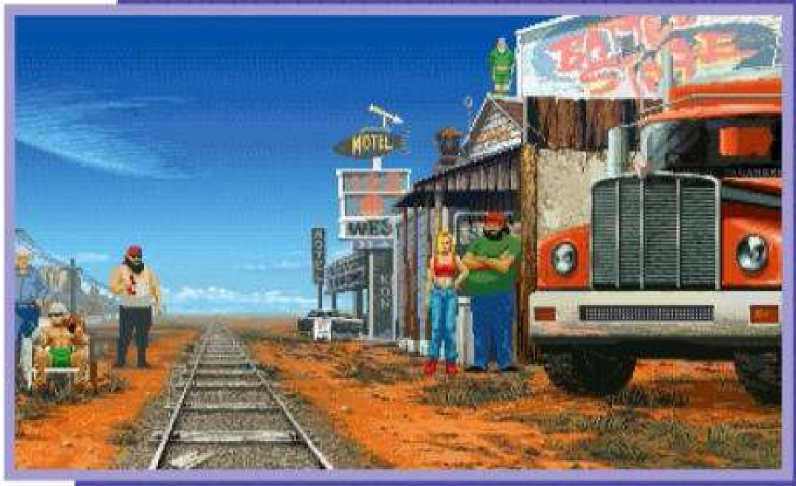
STAYING IN CHARACTER

A LOOK AT HOW COMMON BACKGROUND ELEMENTS ARE USED TO PROMOTE CHARACTER CONSISTENCY IN THE KING OF FIGHTERS AND BEYOND



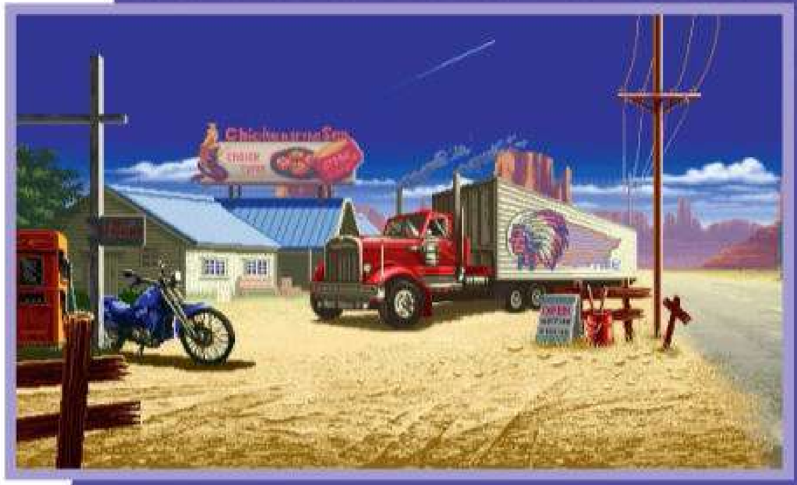
FATAL FURY 2: BIG BEAR STAGE

Big Bear's background is located in the outskirts of Southtown, and shows the town as being located near Monument Valley. Bikers and truckers have come to see the fight, suggesting a rowdy crowd.



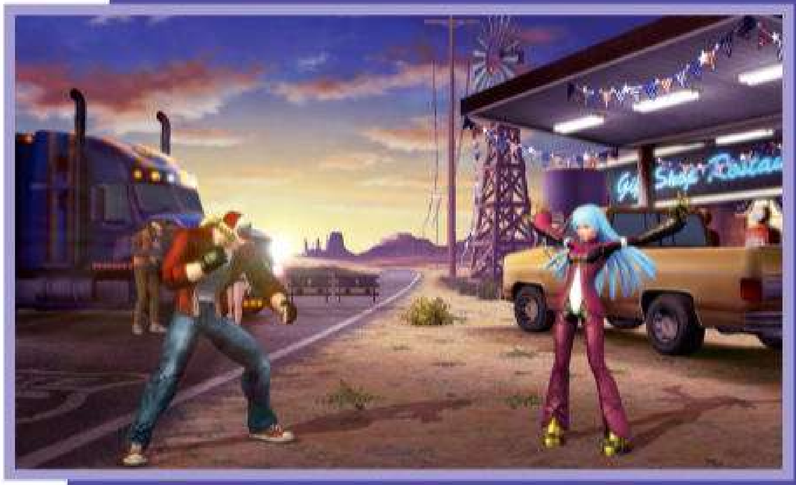
THE KING OF FIGHTERS '96: FATAL FURY TEAM STAGE

A similar town-outskirts background now has a rundown gas station, reducing the spectators and using a slow, laid-back version of Terry's *Fatal Fury 3* theme *Big Shot* to establish a relaxed feeling.



REAL BOUT FATAL FURY 2: TERRY STAGE

Bringing together elements of the previous backdrops, the long road out of town and the large truck are present, this time by a small restaurant. This time, there are no spectators at all.



THE KING OF FIGHTERS XIV: NAVAJOLAND

Bringing the previous elements together, we've got a small crowd and big trucks combined with the gas station and road out of town, and the traditional sunset to cap everything off rather nicely.

MECHANICAL MASTERY

REFUSING TO REST ON ITS LAURELS, SNK HAS CONSTANTLY TWEAKED AND REFINED THE GAME MECHANICS OF THE KING OF FIGHTERS IN SEARCH OF PUGILISTIC PERFECTION

T*he King Of Fighters* series is well known for its mechanical depth and complexity, and with good reason. The first game alone allows an evasion move, a special designated power attack, two different ways of accessing Desperation Moves and quick dashes – both forward and backward. But the thing that made the biggest splash in 1994 was the introduction of team battles, and picking a team of fighters rather than individual characters. This provided an instant, very visible point of differentiation between *The King Of Fighters '94* and rival fighting games, and required players to consider new factors like sequencing their teams – was it better to lead with your best fighter, or save them for last? You could even call in a teammate to aid a dizzy fighter.

The feature was more than a mere novelty. "In the beginning, yes, the concept of having three-on-three team battles was new and interesting. But I believe the system that allowed for things like charging and sharing a special meter between teammates really brought the whole thing together," says Yasuyuki Oda. "The fact that a player can completely turn the tables around even at the last second means that viewers will be on the edge of their seats – which is also important." *The King Of Fighters '95* introduced the ability to build your own team, and for *The King Of Fighters '97*, the social relationships of the characters became a factor. Characters on friendly terms would always aid one another and pass on bonus Power Stocks when defeated, whereas characters that hate each other would never assist one another and actually deduct them from their incoming teammate.

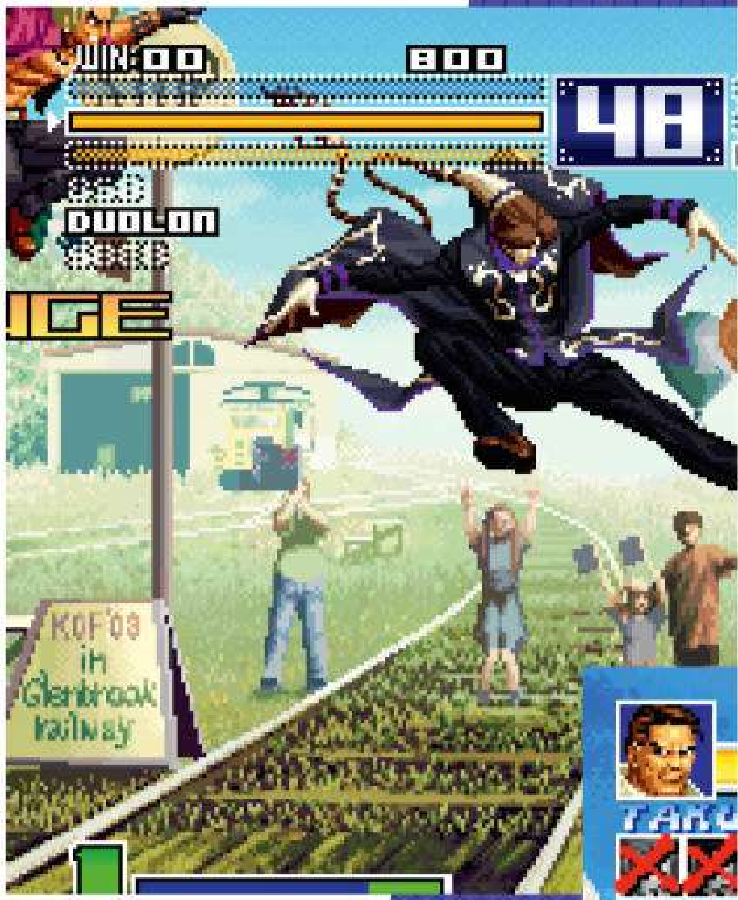
One thing that didn't stick around was the power charge system, which required players to hold a button combination to increase their super gauge. "The system was originally borrowed from the *Art of Fighting* series, but was panned by many since it essentially required players to stop what they're doing to charge. So, we changed it," says Oda. *The King Of Fighters '97* introduced a more standard super gauge behaviour in Advanced mode, though Extra was still available for the purists. Still, this method of play was so associated with SNK's fighting games that it formed a key part of the SNK Groove system in *Capcom Vs SNK*.

The King Of Fighters '99 was the next big mechanical leap, introducing the Striker system. Teams could now have four characters – three to take part in active combat, and one to act as the Striker, who could be called in to assist in tough spots. *The King Of Fighters 2000* allowed each character to substitute an alternative Striker, while *2001* allowed the player to choose how many characters would fight and how many were Strikers. This era isn't so fondly remembered, though. "Well, it gave players more choices when it came to editing teams, combo variations, etc," says Oda. "However, many people felt it made the game too complex, and surely there's some frustration to be had when your bread-and-butter combos keep getting interrupted." Strikers would be axed in *The King Of Fighters 2002*, never to return.

The King Of Fighters 2003 and *XI* radically overhauled the team-battle aspect of the game, implementing a tag team system with single-round fights and instant character changes. It's an exciting system, but one that previously came with some heavy technical requirements – to maintain seamless play, the hardware needed to either hold all six characters' data in memory simultaneously, or be able to swap it out near instantly. While we haven't seen a tag team entry in the series in a while, hardware advances may change that. "Changing a character in real time no longer requires a reduction in data to achieve quick load times, and so I can imagine that more games featuring this type of system will be released in the future," says Oda.

In recent years, the team has concentrated on making *The King Of Fighters* more accessible to newcomers. "*KOF* is already complex just by the simple fact you have to use three characters. So, we try to make the controls as easy as possible to memorize," says Oda. Recognising that it's still a fairly complex series, he adds, "We also have a selection of other fighting games, like *Samurai Shodown*, which appeal to those who like their system more straightforward." *The King Of Fighters XIV* removed the Drive gauge of its predecessor, reducing the number of things the player has to keep track of, while implementing new Rush Combos – automatic attack chains accessed by repeatedly hitting the light punch button.

The continued mechanical evolution of *The King Of Fighters* has meant that plenty of favourite features have been left behind over the years, but it's all in service of creating the best experience possible – and that spirit of experimentation is probably what led to the creation of those mechanics in the first place. And that's part of what makes the series great – whether you prefer the flexible team system of *The King Of Fighters 2001* or the frantic tag battles of *The King Of Fighters XI*, it's easy to find a system that you prefer. ▶



» [Neo Geo] You can just see Shen Woo exiting the scene as his tag partner Duo Lon flies in with a kick.

» [Neo Geo] With the dodge move in place, projectiles no longer forced a block, jump or counterattack.

B.A.0000
K'
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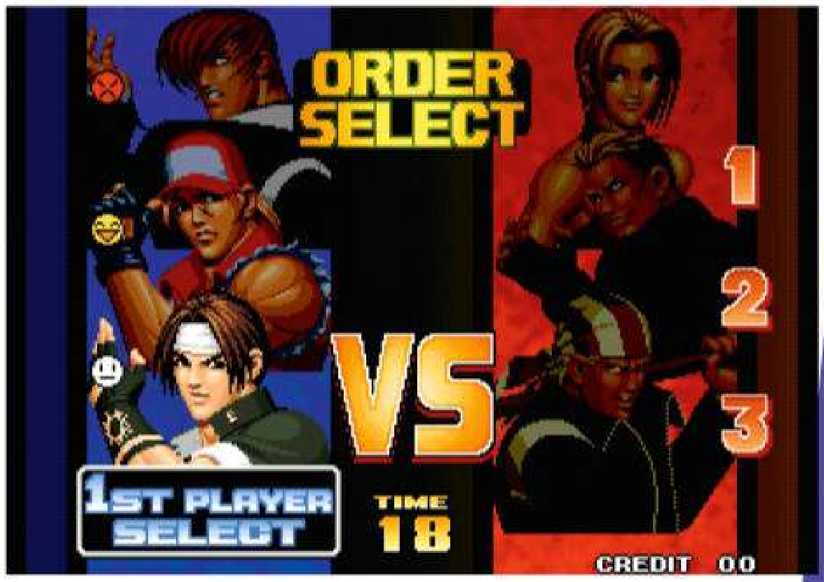
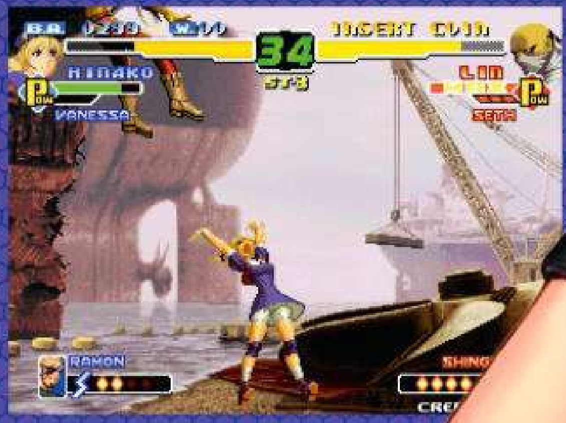
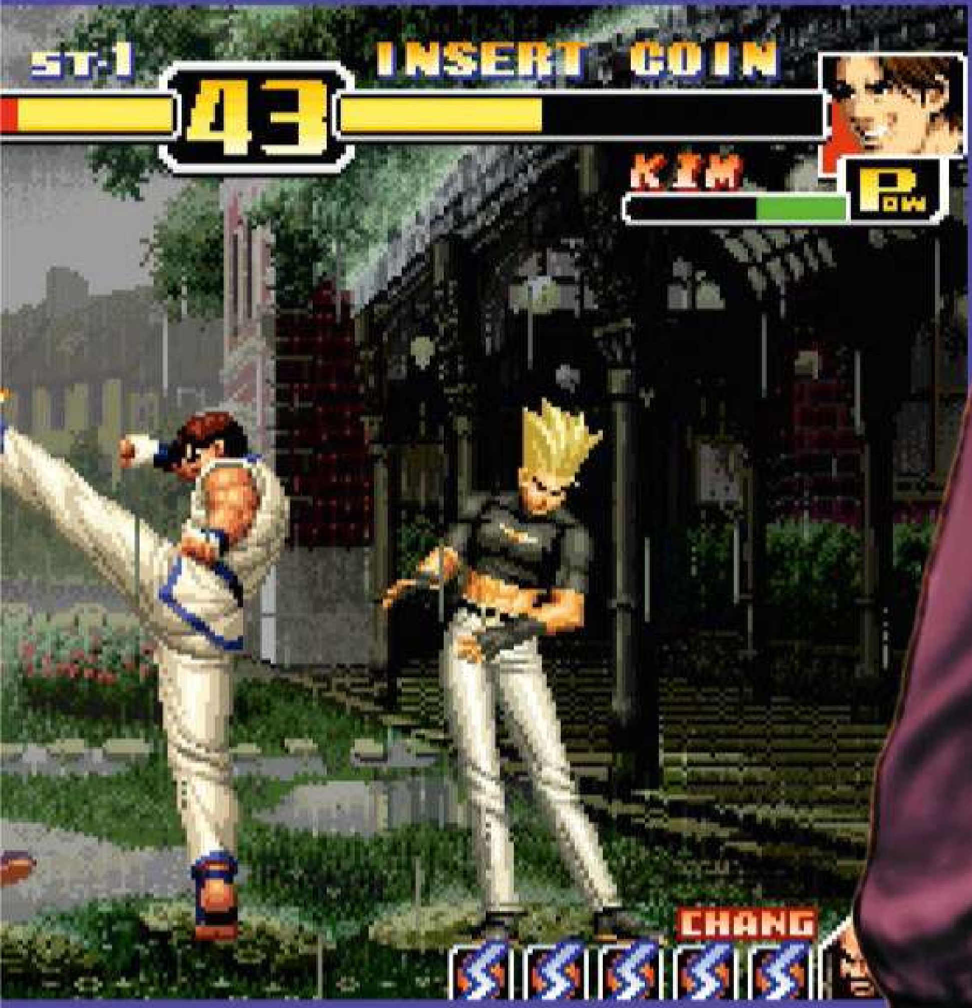


» [Neo Geo] Those faces represent how the characters feel about each other – Iori's always grumpy.



» [Neo Geo] Sometimes, a character's mechanical identity is at odds with their appearance – check out sumo grappler Hinako here.



» [Neo Geo] Benimaru's the Striker here, but he doesn't appear to be doing much of worth, the lazy git.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

HOW THE REST OF THE FIGHTING GAME SCENE ADOPTED THE TEAM BATTLE MODE AS A STANDARD FEATURE

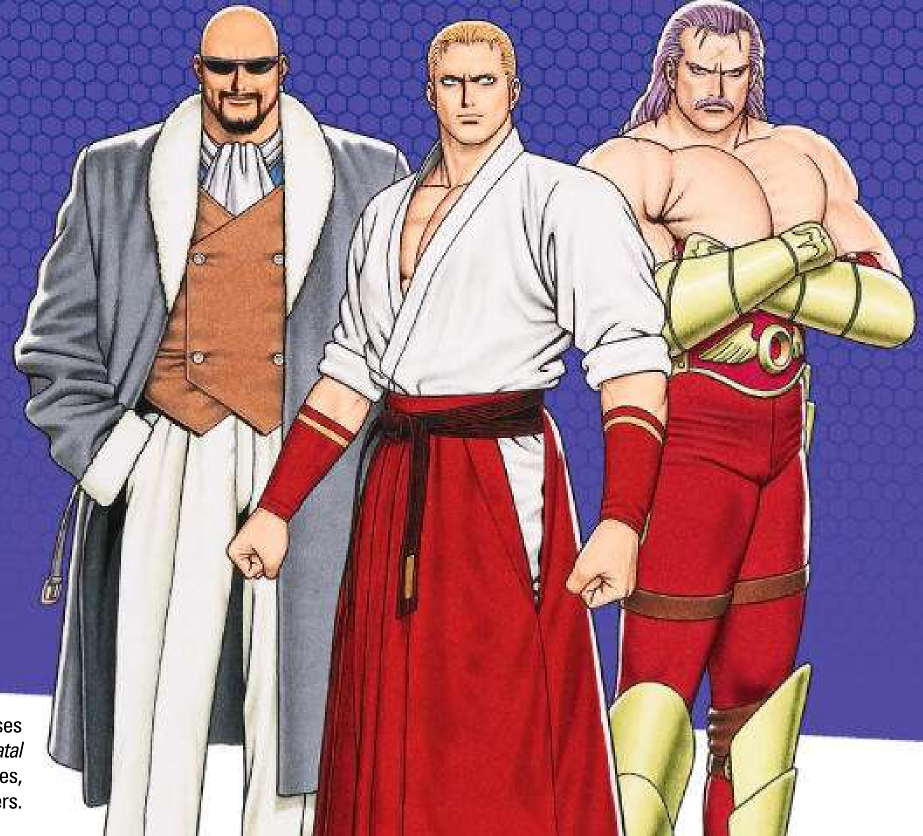
With the level of competition in the fighting game scene of the mid-Nineties, fighting game developers were constantly adopting ideas from one another in a bid to ensure that their games continued to meet the evolving expectations of players. With the success of *The King Of Fighters '94* and its unique three-on-three battle format, other fighting games quickly incorporated and expanded upon the idea.

2D fighting games soon moved to true tag team action, as seen in games like *Kizuna Encounter* and *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*, so the feature actually became more prominent in 3D fighting games where true tag team action was more technically challenging to achieve. While the arcade version was a strictly one-on-one affair, *Tekken 2*'s PlayStation port featured a Team Battle mode supporting teams of up to eight characters per player. The series kept the mode ever since, and it was also added to the *Soulcalibur* series. Team fights were also the major selling point of *Virtua Fighter 3tb*, Sega's 1997 update of the flagship fighting game released the previous year, and a part of *Dead Or Alive*'s PlayStation port. Of course, none of them replicated the ability to call a teammate to assist mid-fight, nor the social relationships between teammates.

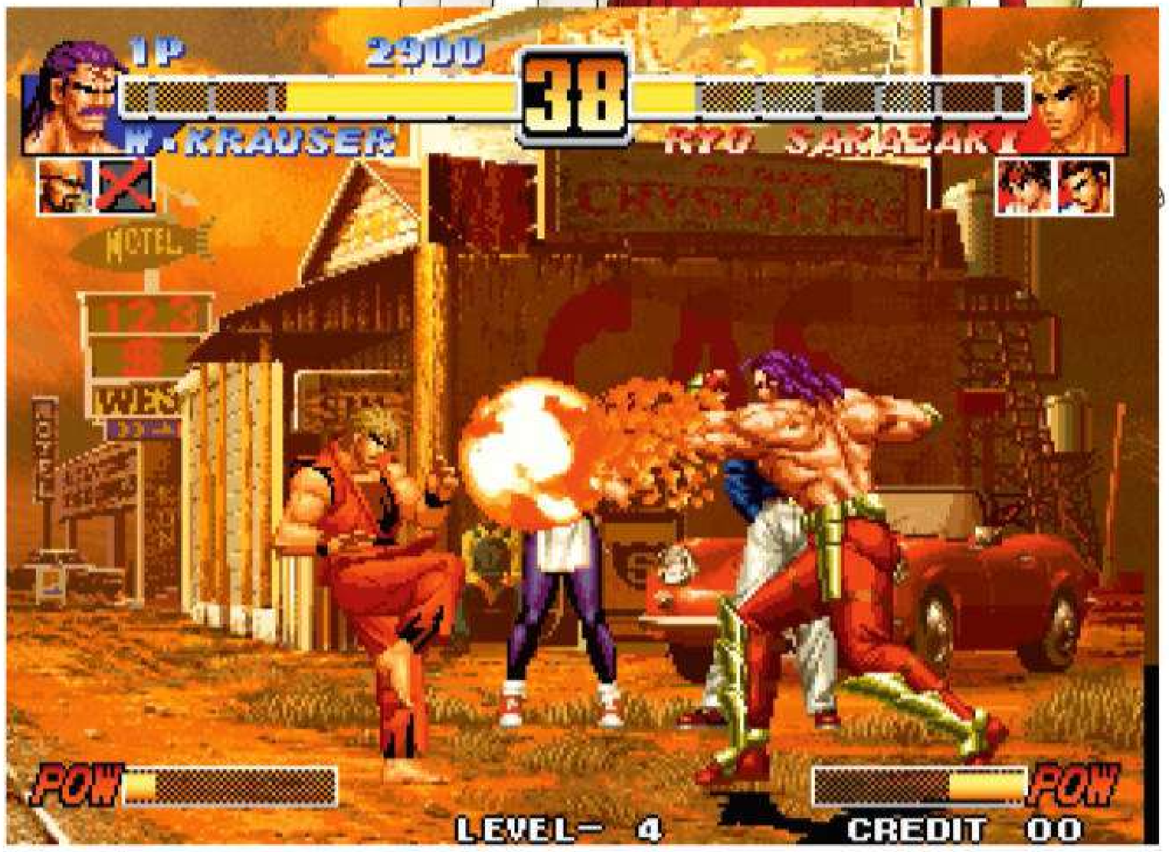
Still, other 2D fighting games did adopt the system. *Capcom Vs SNK* saw Capcom use the signature SNK style but put its own twist on the system, by assigning points to different fighters based on their relative power, and allowing you to choose one to four characters with four points. Amusingly, Capcom didn't see fit to adopt the feature in its rival *Street Fighter* series until *Ultra Street Fighter IV* was released in 2014, 20 years after *The King Of Fighters* brought it to prominence. *Mortal Kombat* was even later to the party, gaining the mode with *Mortal Kombat 11* in 2019.

BADASS BOSSES

THERE'S A REAL SENSE OF SATISFACTION TO BE HAD IN TAKING OUT A KING OF FIGHTERS BOSS, AS THEY'RE SOME OF THE FIERCEST FINAL OPPONENTS IN FIGHTING GAMES



» This evil alliance comprises the major villains of the *Fatal Fury* and *Art Of Fighting* series, recast as regular fighters.



» [Neo Geo] When characters are originally designed as bosses, the team can struggle to balance them for regular play.

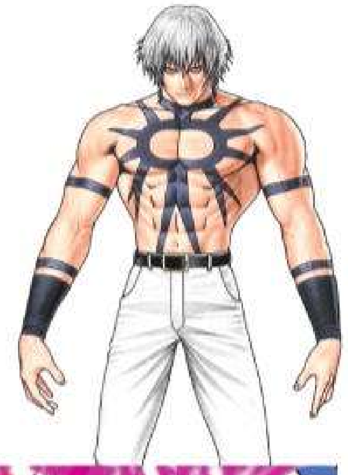
Sometimes, a particular piece of game design will feature so prominently across a single developer's works that players come to name it after the company itself – anything from relatively simple touches like 'Sega blue skies' to the comprehensive 'Ubisoft formula' for open-world game design. In large part because of *The King Of Fighters*, SNK's signature contribution to game design is the 'SNK boss' – a final opponent who is dramatically superior to any regular character. Often, they have behaviours that completely bypass the systems other characters work within, and attacks so powerful that any pretence of fairness is simply abandoned. They are incredibly frustrating to play against, and yet they're so memorable that they have become an expected feature of the series.

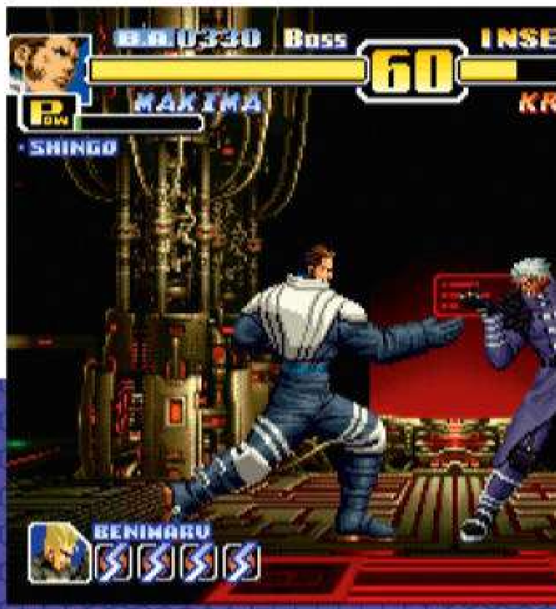
The need for such strong foes came from the environment of the time. "This might catch a bit of flak, but the idea originally came about as a means to push arcade players into beating a game," says Yasuyuki Oda. "Naturally, this concept changed when we ported these games onto home consoles." It makes sense from an arcade operator's perspective – if the player is good enough to have reached that point, they've been on the machine longer than is optimal. By that point, they're invested in victory and may be more tempted to drop a few coins in to finish the game than they would be if they had failed earlier.

Of course, being a crossover game, *The King Of Fighters '94* could have used any of the iconic bosses from past games. Instead, SNK created a new character with the intention of being the most violent, evil boss character to date – though it did honour the crossover theme by giving Rugal the Reppuken and Kaiser Wave, moves used by the *Fatal Fury* bosses Geese Howard and Wolfgang Krauser respectively. Rugal was a boss that could believably stand up to a team of three fighters, and was so well-received that he returned in a cybernetically enhanced form for *The King Of Fighters '95*. He later showed up in *The King Of Fighters '98* and *2002*, and you would certainly be foolish to bet against the notoriously tough boss showing up again in the future.

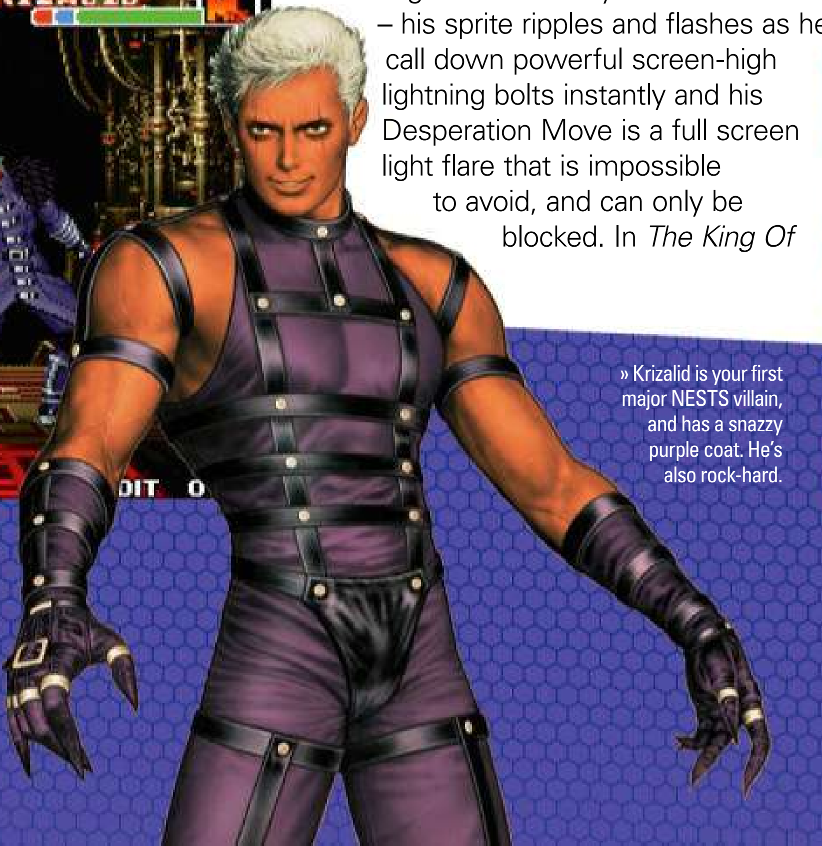
The storyline had to move on, however, and new bosses have been needed for each game accordingly. This means coming up with new characters that can top past efforts, both in terms of their appearance and difficulty. Typically, SNK has chosen to do this not with size and scale, which is a common way to go, but by creating opponents of ordinary size and making them far more powerful than they would otherwise appear to be. "We tend to focus on things like having their attacks take up the whole screen, or utilizing strange special effects in order to differentiate them from standard characters," says Oda.

A great case study is Orochi in *The King Of Fighters '97* – his sprite ripples and flashes as he floats about, he can call down powerful screen-high lightning bolts instantly and his Desperation Move is a full screen light flare that is impossible to avoid, and can only be blocked. In *The King Of*

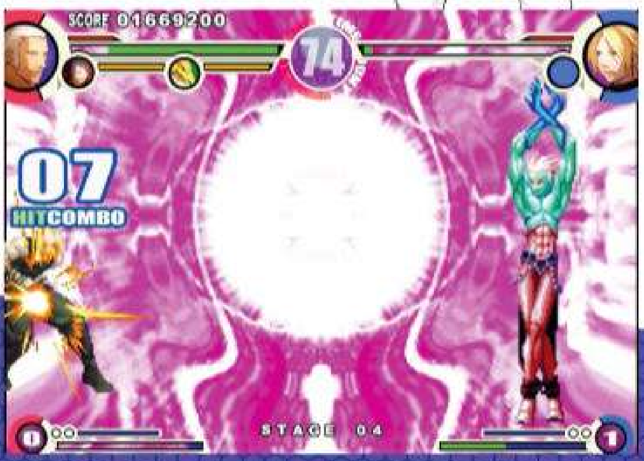




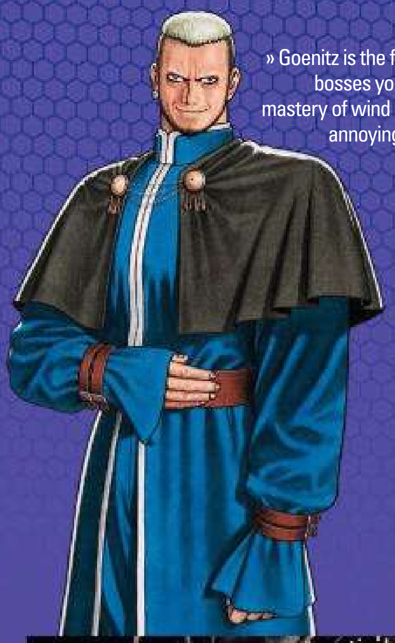
» [Neo Geo] Many bosses have two phases – Krizalid here is wearing his coat, so you can tell he's not serious yet.



» Krizalid is your first major NESTS villain, and has a snazzy purple coat. He's also rock-hard.



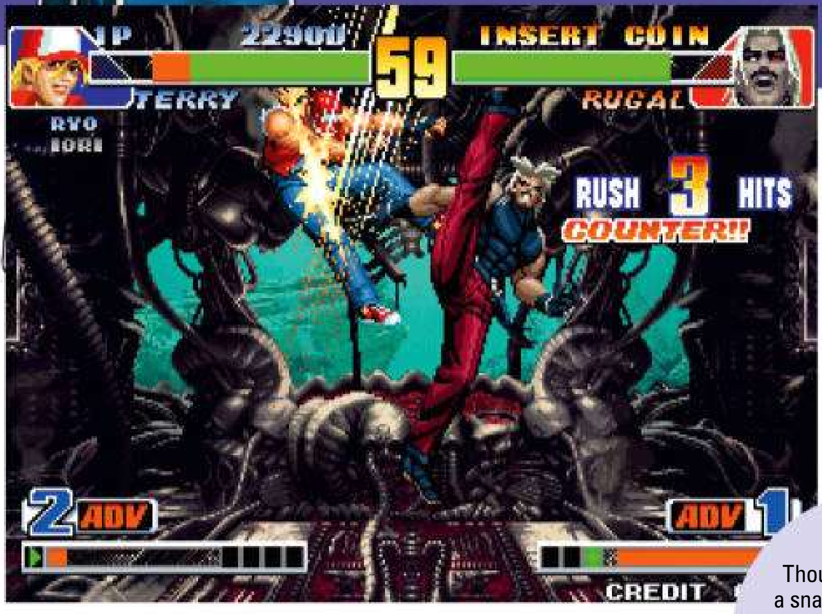
» [PS2] If this looks like an obnoxious, unavoidable attack, that's because it is exactly what it is.



» Goenitz is the first of the Orochi bosses you'll meet, and his mastery of wind is extraordinarily annoying to fight against.

WHAT MAKES A MONSTER

WITH FOUR APPEARANCES AS A FINAL BOSS, RUGAL IS THE MOST FEARED AND REVERED VILLAIN THE KING OF FIGHTERS HAS TO OFFER. BUT WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES HIM SUCH AN ADMIRABLE ADVERSARY?

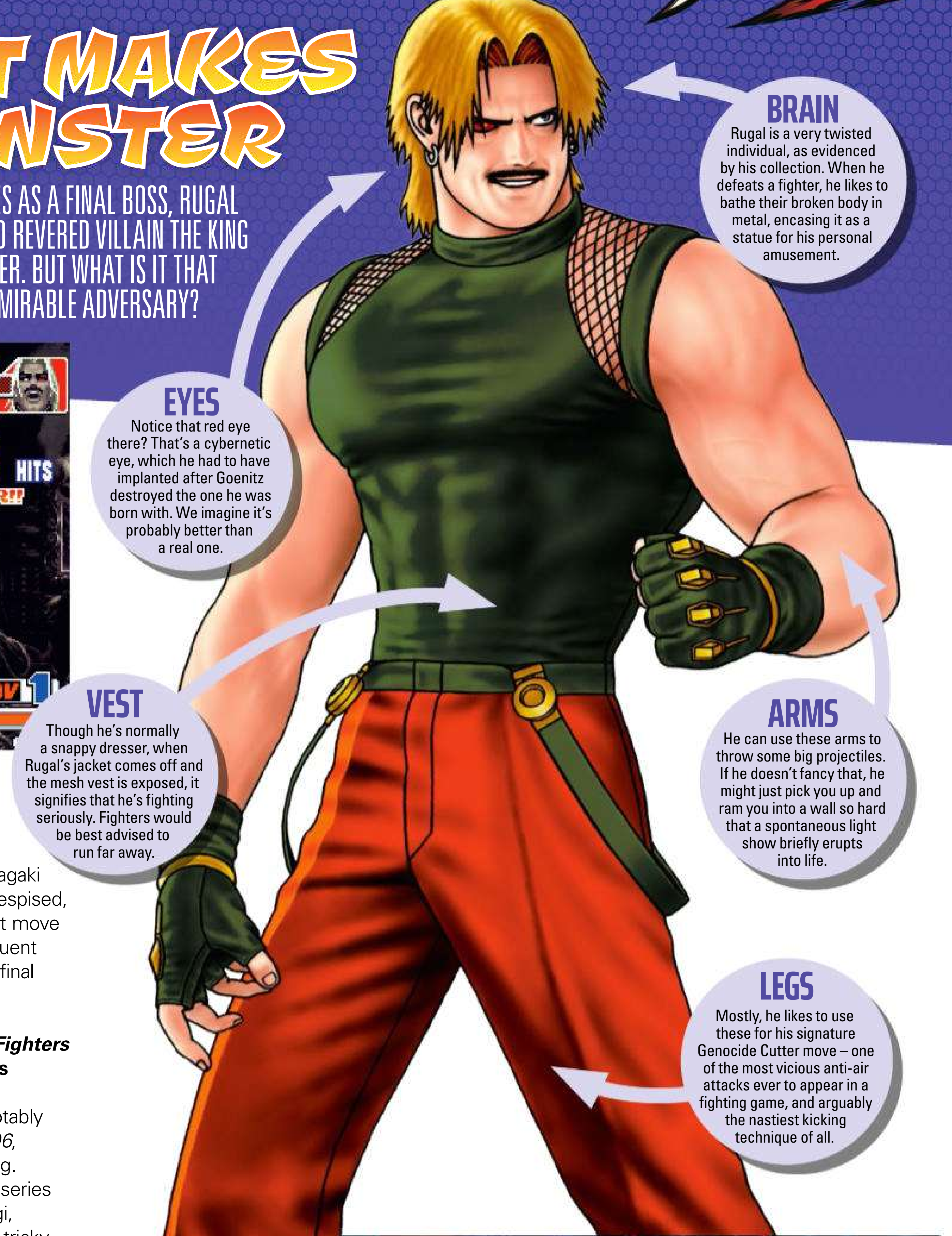


» [Neo Geo] Omega Rugal is a nightmare for any long-term fan of the series, thanks to this jumping Genocide Cutter kick.

Fighters 2001, Igniz is distinguished by his impressively animated coat and a super move that sends a wave of screen-filling beams across the playfield. Then there's Magaki in *The King Of Fighters XI* – a character designed to be despised, whose attacks include transparent, oversized fireballs that move in arcs. In fact, his various projectile attacks were so frequent that SNK joked that it had "appropriated a design for the final boss of a new shooting game" for the character.

But while main bosses created for *The King Of Fighters* are rarely integrated into the main cast, bosses from games like *Fatal Fury* and *Art Of Fighting* have appeared as regular fighters. This most notably happened with the Boss team in *The King Of Fighters '96*, comprising Geese Howard, Wolfgang Krauser and Mr Big. Likewise, original sub-bosses from *The King Of Fighters* series sometimes join the regular cast, such as Saisyu Kusanagi, Chizuru Kagura and Kula Diamond. These characters are tricky to adjust. "Generally we take a boss's strong attacks and adjust them to a state where they're able to be properly played against, but it's tough every time," Oda explains. "In many cases, they get nerfed a bit too much."

With the move to consoles as the primary platform for the series, SNK bosses don't feel quite as brutal as in the past – Antonov and Verse in *The King Of Fighters XIV* feel like a much more reasonable challenge than the likes of Goenitz or Zero ever did. Though we've got a soft spot for Antonov in particular, only time will tell if they eventually become favourites amongst the many memorable bosses of the series. Speaking of favourites, does Oda favour any of the boss characters over the others? "Rugal, hands down," he says. "That end scene with the self-destruct switch is so iconic." Like we said – don't bet against seeing him again one day. ▶



BRAIN
Rugal is a very twisted individual, as evidenced by his collection. When he defeats a fighter, he likes to bathe their broken body in metal, encasing it as a statue for his personal amusement.

EYES
Notice that red eye there? That's a cybernetic eye, which he had to have implanted after Goenitz destroyed the one he was born with. We imagine it's probably better than a real one.

VEST
Though he's normally a snappy dresser, when Rugal's jacket comes off and the mesh vest is exposed, it signifies that he's fighting seriously. Fighters would be best advised to run far away.

ARMS
He can use these arms to throw some big projectiles. If he doesn't fancy that, he might just pick you up and ram you into a wall so hard that a spontaneous light show briefly erupts into life.

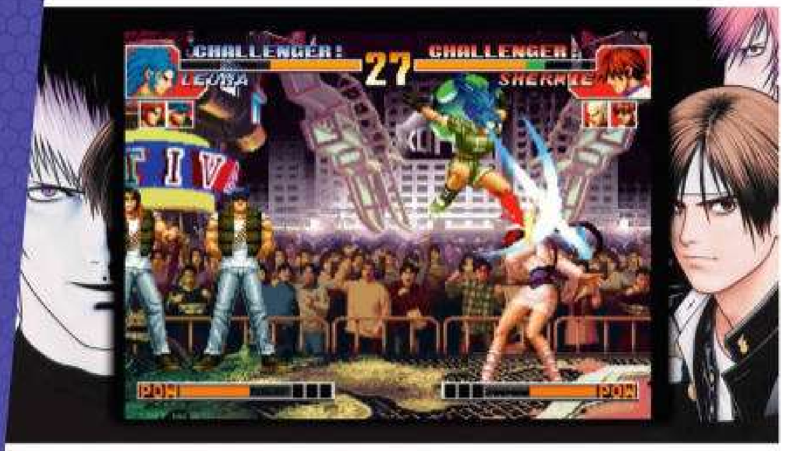
LEGS
Mostly, he likes to use these for his signature Genocide Cutter move – one of the most vicious anti-air attacks ever to appear in a fighting game, and arguably the nastiest kicking technique of all.

1P- 199820
TIME
INSERT COIN
KIM KAPHWAN
48
RUGAL B.
POW
POW
LEVEL- 4
CREDIT 00

COMPETITIVE EDGE

THE KING OF FIGHTERS HAS GIVEN PLENTY OF JOY TO THE FIGHTING GAME TOURNAMENT SCENE – BUT HAS IT TAKEN ANYTHING FROM IT IN RETURN?

The *King Of Fighters* series has long been popular with competitive fighting gamers – just dive into the world of online video sites to find ancient VHS rips of Japanese events. Gamers are responsible for the success of *The King Of Fighters*, but the series has also allowed competitive fighting gamers like Ryan Hart to find success. His first national tournament win was on *KOF 96*, and his first world title win was on *KOF 98*. That popularity has extended globally, and the series has remained relevant long past its initial introduction, with games being played at the highest level of competition and SNK actively supporting the tournament scene.



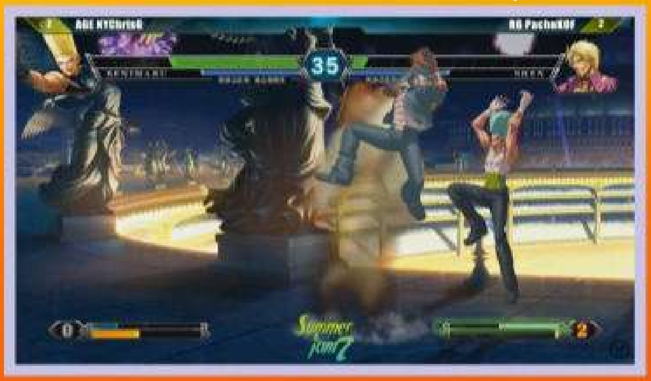
» [PC] *The King Of Fighters '97* is popular enough amongst players that a version with online play was released for modern systems.

Back in the Nineties, part of the reason that *The King Of Fighters* series was easy to love from a competitive point of view was that the games were new every year. For an audience that had seen three years of Capcom's careful, steady evolution of *Street Fighter II* via updated versions, each annual *The King Of Fighters* release was a dream – new characters, new backgrounds, new music, the works. Having to relearn your favourite character's match-ups just felt better within the context of a whole new game. For better or worse, you also knew that your learning wouldn't be disrupted by new balance changes six months down the line.

Of course, a lot of that had to do with how the games were being made back in the Nineties. "During the days of arcade mania, SNK's schedule was extremely flexible as we were developing and manufacturing games built for hardware that was also made internally in our factories," says Oda. "Our games also didn't require different modes or localisation, and so we were able to crank out a game every year." The annual schedule had survived even SNK's bankruptcy in 2001, but was abandoned after *The King Of Fighters 2003*, with *The King Of Fighters XI* becoming the first numbered version in 2005. The series has slowed down considerably since, and SNK has now adopted balance patches and updates. "It

GET HYPE

THE KING OF FIGHTERS TOURNAMENT MATCHES THAT GOT THE CROWD AND COMMENTATORS OUT OF THEIR SEATS

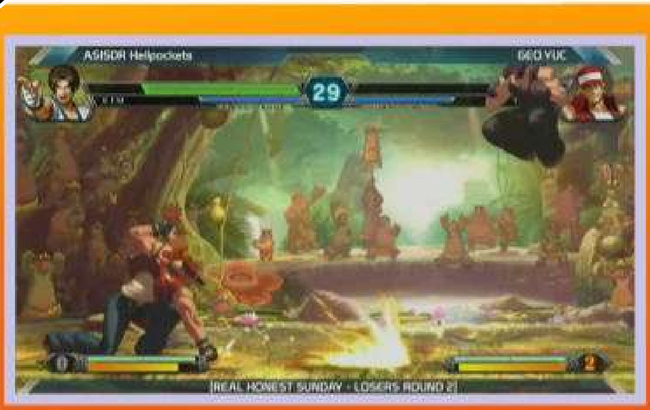


SUMMER JAM 7 GRAND FINAL

NYCHRISG VS PACHUKOF

`tinyurl.com/KOFcomp1`

In the final match of the tournament, both players are down to their very last character. NYChrisG presses the early advantage with Benimaru and after a corner combo, takes PachuKOF's Shen Woo down to less than 10% health. In a last ditch attack, PachuKOF activates Hyper Drive with the commentator screaming "what are you doing?" – only to succeed and win the tournament.



REAL HONEST SUNDAY 6.3

HELLPOCKETS VS GEO.YUC

`tinyurl.com/KOFcomp2`

In round two of the losers bracket, with each player down to their last character, Hellpockets has the advantage with his Kim at over 70% life and GEO.YUC's Terry unable to even block, lest the chip damage kill him. But GEO.YUC manages to turn the whole situation around in one massive 11-hit combo with a Max Cancel finish, advancing to the next round of the event.

22
SYLVIE
MAI
4
4

» [PS4] *The King Of Fighters XIV* was also featured at Evo, and hosted some high-pressure competition that was great fun to watch.

39
SHEN
VICE

» [PC] *The King Of Fighters XIII* spent a few years as a main attraction at the prestigious Evolution Championship Series.

59
NAMELESS
SHINGO

» [PC] *The King Of Fighters 2002: Unlimited Match* became the first game in the series to receive rollback netcode in 2020.

became simply impossible to keep that up during the console generation, where a game can go on sale across the globe simultaneously," says Oda of the annual schedule. "It's great that games can become even more polished thanks to updates, but the time it takes is certainly draining."

Because the games are so highly regarded, they have featured in the most prestigious fighting game events in the world. "The biggest event I attended was Evo. I was taken aback seeing so many people from around the world fighting and having fun," Oda tells us. *The King Of Fighters XIII* was played as a main game from 2012-2014, and *The King Of Fighters XIV* was featured in 2017. As the Neo Geo arcade hardware became cheap and easily available later in its life, the series had a greater global spread than some of its competitors, and that global impact shows today through the diversity of successful players in the competitive scene. Look over most top eight lists in the Evolution Championship Series, and more often than not you'll see a list of Japanese and American players. Not so with *The King Of Fighters*. At Evo 2012, Korean competitor Kwang-noh Lee (MadKOF) won *The King Of Fighters XIII* tournament, beating his Mexican opponent Armando 'Bala' Velázquez in the final. Other successful players over the years have come from Singapore, Taiwan, France, China and the United Arab Emirates.

Does the amount of high-level play influence development of future games? "It's almost our policy to develop our games in a vacuum without much input from the outside, so I can't really say we do," Oda responds. "But this might change in the future." Where player preferences are considered is in the choice of older games to bring back in competitive form. Though SNK has reissued many of the series' past hits in some fashion, special attention has been paid to the competitively favoured entries. *The King Of Fighters '98: Ultimate Match* rebalanced and expanded the original game's roster in 2008, and *The King Of Fighters 2002: Unlimited Match* rebalanced and graphically overhauled that game in 2009. *The King Of Fighters '97 Global Match* was released with online matchmaking in 2018. The PC version of *The King Of Fighters 2002: Unlimited Match* was even updated to use rollback netcode in 2020, which is considered to be the gold standard by fighting game fans. Getting the netcode is important too, as the global pandemic has forced the competitive gaming world to adapt to a new situation. In fact, this has impacted all the ways in which SNK's esports support programme has worked. "Before COVID-19, there were a lot of offline events and tournaments, and so we would hand out merchandise, goods and even pot bonuses," says Oda. "But now online events have become the norm, and so we're still looking for different methods in terms of support." While the restrictions on offline gathering won't last forever, improving the online experience will surely continue to be important as time goes by. ▶

EVO 2012
BBZ VS HAITANI

tinyurl.com/KOFcomp3

In a different kind of dramatic final-round finish, BBZ and Haitani have taken one match apiece and are both down to their final character in the deciding match – Shen Woo vs Mr Karate. In a show of overwhelming force, BBZ pushes Haitani back into the corner with relentless pressure, eventually breaking his opponent's guard to force a match-winning combo, and a perfect victory at that.

EVO 2017 GRAND FINAL
ET VS XIAOHAI

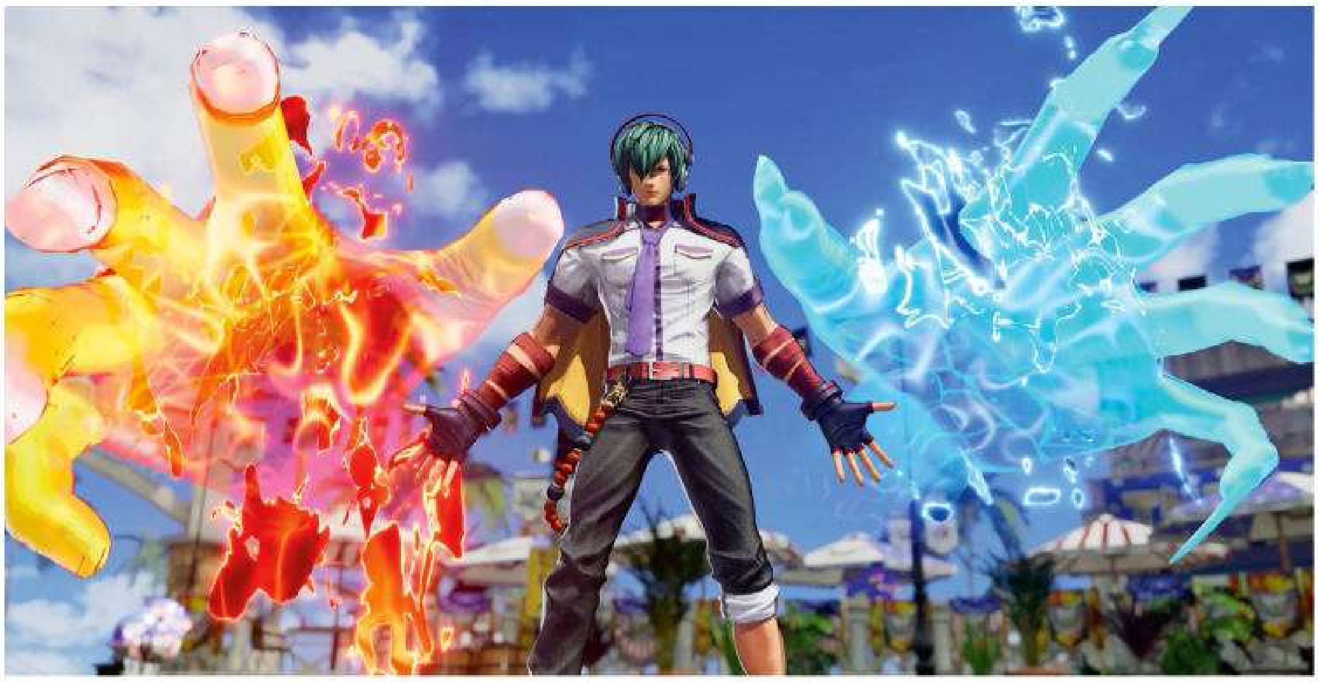
tinyurl.com/KOFcomp4

Going into the final round of this *King Of Fighters XIV* tournament, ET was on the back foot against the winner of the Evo 2014 *King Of Fighters XIII* event – he had a slight life disadvantage and was playing the low-tier character Goro Daimon. But his unconventional pick helped him to dish out big damage, including near 50% health from one command grab, and ultimately claim victory.

EVO 2018 GRAND FINAL
ET VS ZJZ

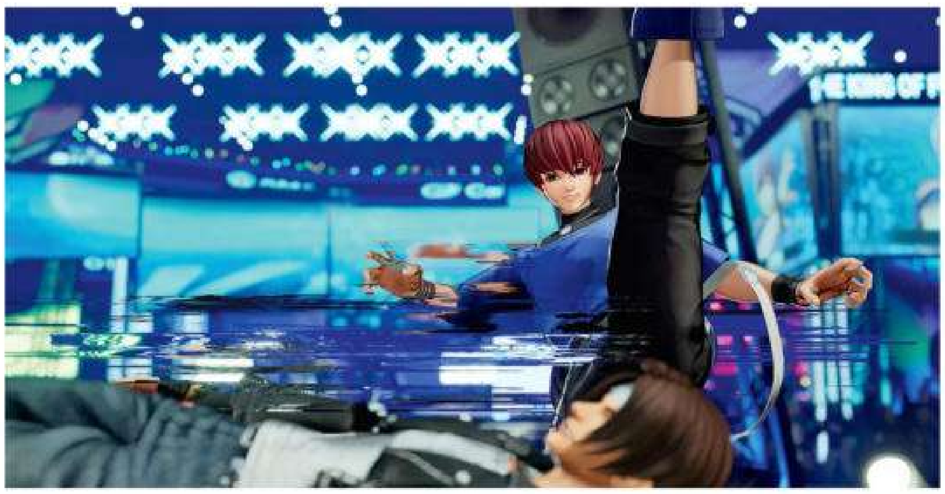
tinyurl.com/KOFcomp5

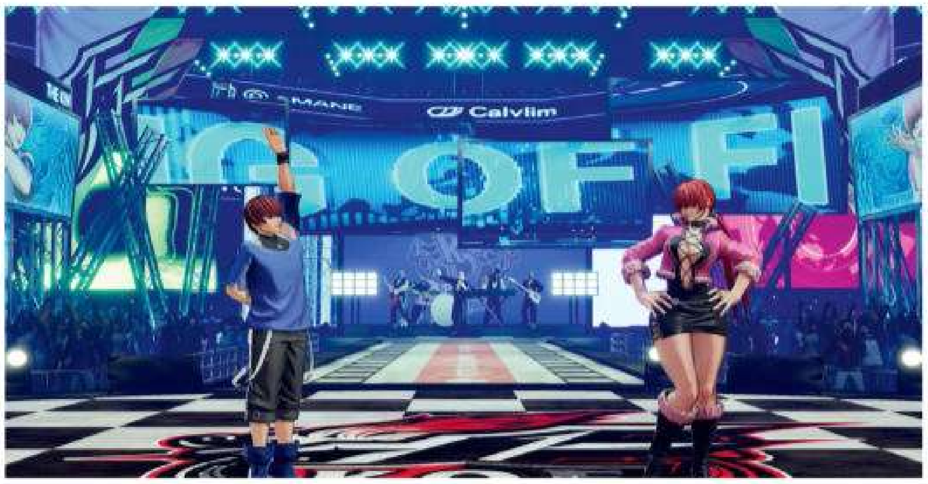
Two Taiwanese players battled it out in the finals of the Evo 2018 *King Of Fighters XIV* side event, with ET defending his title from 2017. ZJZ has pushed things to the wire, resetting the bracket and bringing the game down to a final dramatic clash between his Yuri and ET's Leona. The fast and frantic round is high-level play at its finest, so we won't spoil the winner – go watch it for yourself.



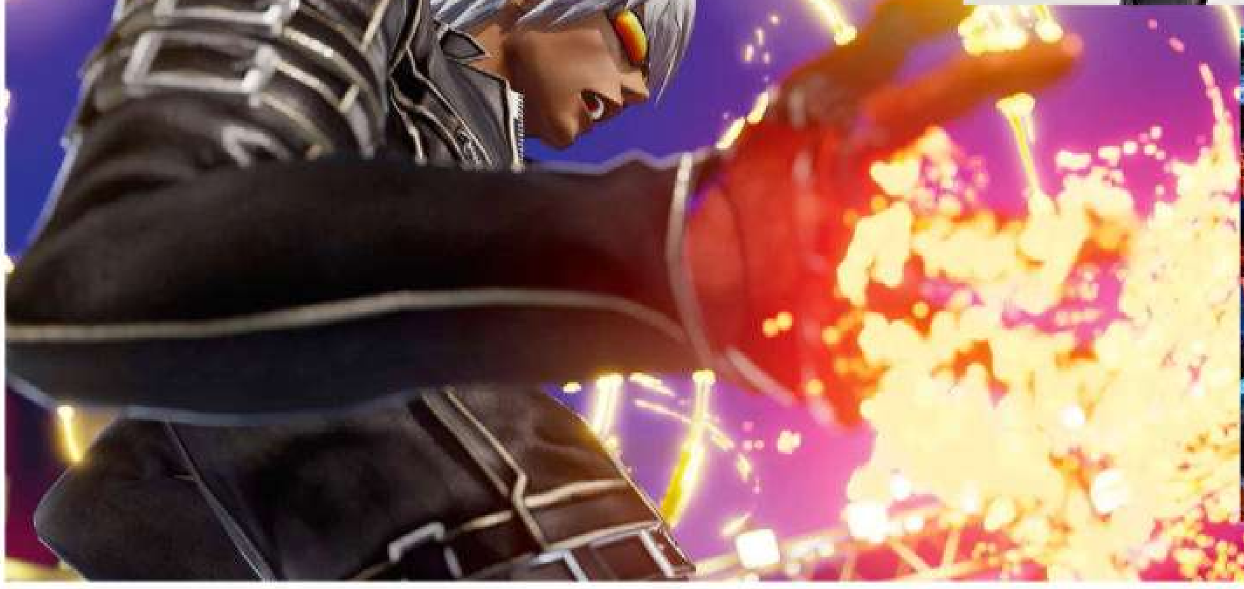
» [PS4] Shun'ei is the hero of the latest game, though we don't know who the major villain is yet.

» [PS4] Chris has the advantage over Kyo. Knowing what he's all about, that could be trouble for humanity.

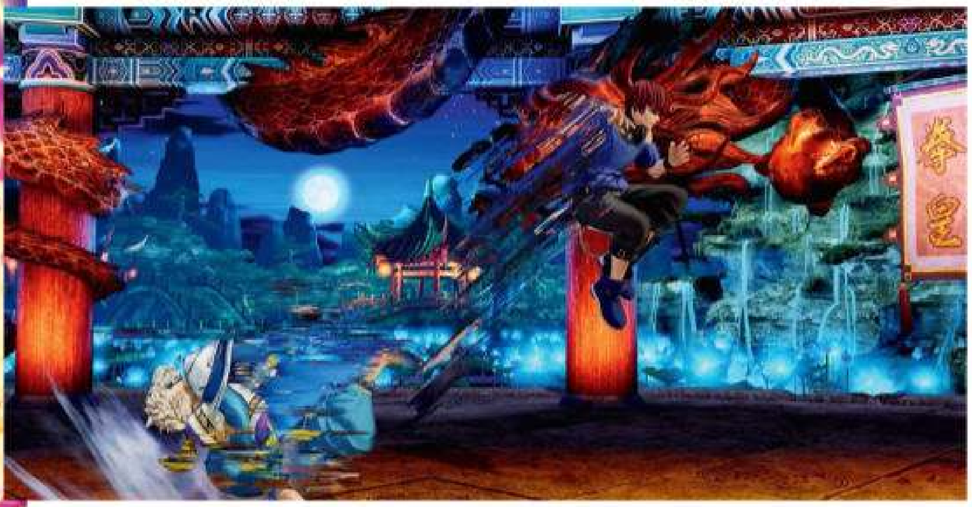




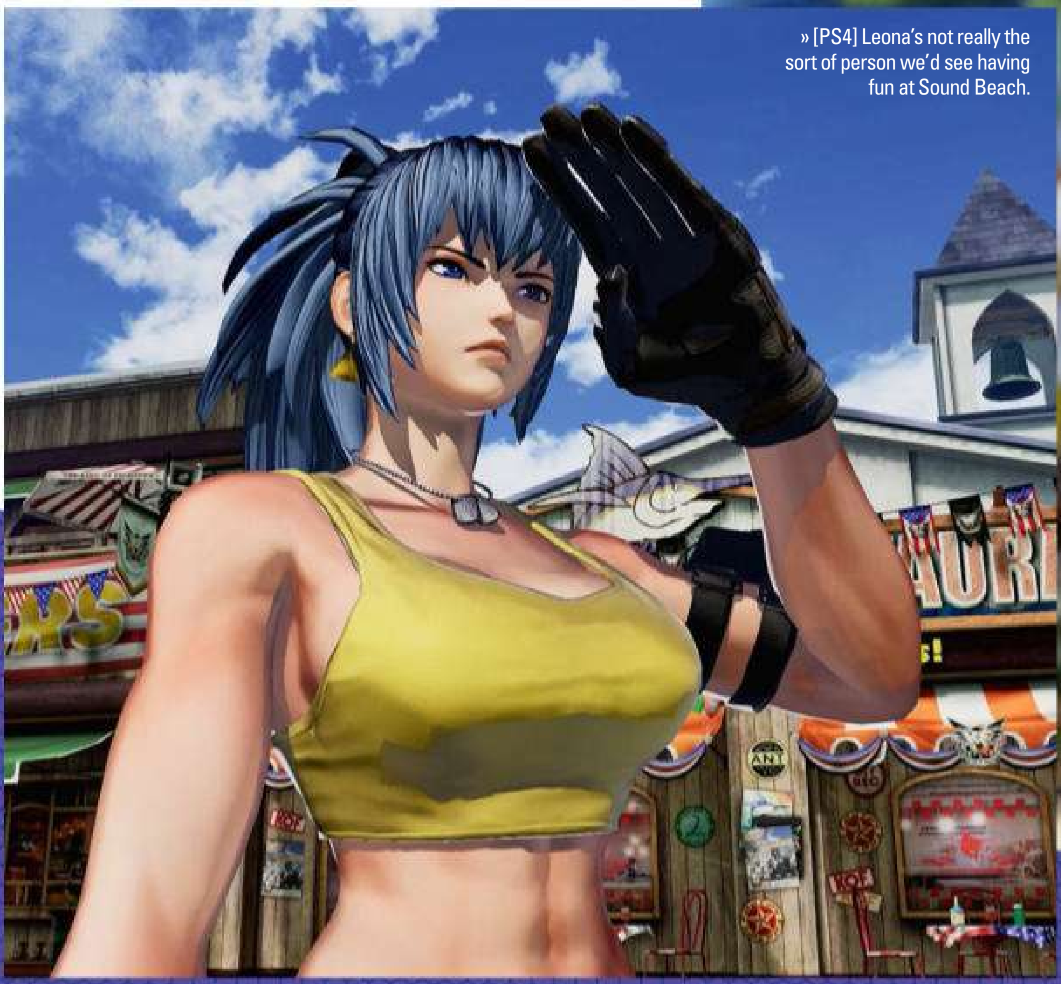
» [PS4] Teammates Chris and Shermie face off for what you'd assume would be a friendly battle.



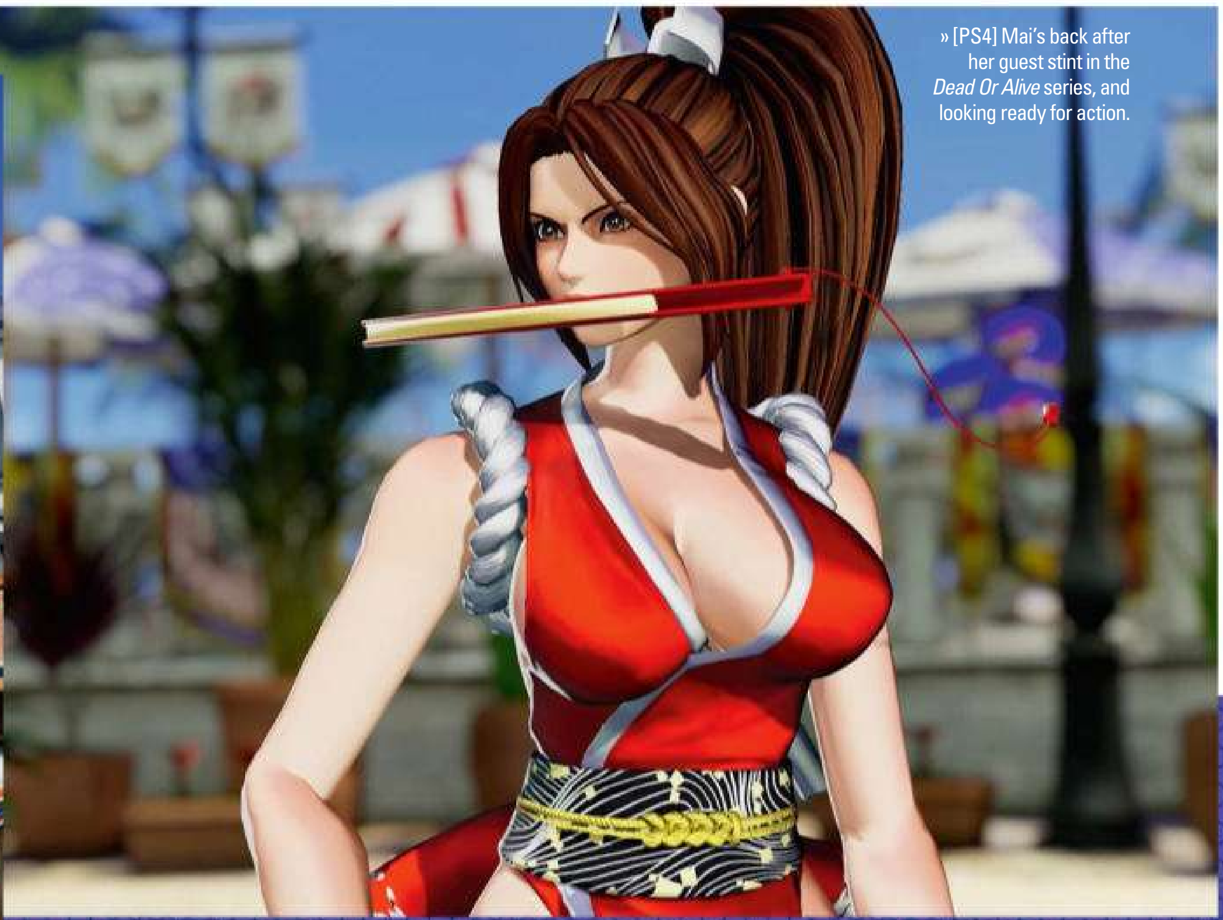
» [PS4] K' looks just as cool as he ever did, and remains the hot-headed scrapper he always was.



» [PS4] The returning villain Chris uses his speed to outmanoeuvre Team Hero member Meitenkun.



» [PS4] Leona's not really the sort of person we'd see having fun at Sound Beach.



» [PS4] Mai's back after her guest stint in the *Dead Or Alive* series, and looking ready for action.

KOF XV
THE KING OF FIGHTERS

FORWARD THINKING

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THE KING OF FIGHTERS? WE SPEAK TO YASUYUKI ODA ABOUT THE NEXT GAME IN THE SERIES, THE KING OF FIGHTERS XV

For fans that have been following *The King Of Fighters* since the Neo Geo days, the extended wait between new entries in *The King Of Fighters* series must be agonising. *The King Of Fighters XV* was first mentioned at an SNK investor's conference in 2018, with the aim of a 2020 release, and the game was officially announced with a logo reveal at the Evolution Championship Series in 2019. The game was pushed to 2021, with character reveals and more beginning at the start of the year, but by June the game had been delayed to 2022 with SNK citing difficulties in developing the game during the COVID-19 pandemic.

So what do we know about *The King Of Fighters XV* so far? Where the plot is concerned, the game's producer Yasuyuki Oda is keeping his cards close to his chest. "All I can say right now is that it continues after *The King Of Fighters XIV*, and that Shun'ei is the main protagonist," he says. How about characters? "Well, Yashiro Nanakase's reveal made a huge splash, but we have many more surprises on the way so look forward to it!" While Oda isn't giving too much away there, the fact that Yashiro was revealed at all is telling in itself.

To date, Yashiro, Shermie and Chris are three of the four revealed characters that didn't appear in *The King Of Fighters XIV*. It's the first time we've seen Team Orochi outside of *Dream Match* games since their debut in *The King Of Fighters '97*, and they died during the events of that game. So it's safe to assume that their return has something to do with Verse, the time-warping final boss of *The King Of Fighters XIV*. The other returning character that wasn't in *The King Of Fighters XIV* is Chizuru Kagura, who will be teaming up with Kyo and Iori. Given that those two are mortal enemies, but that the three of them together were instrumental in sealing away Orochi before, it's a good bet that the newly revived villains will play a key role in the plot.

But what of the gameplay side of things? So far, there's not a lot to go on from the trailers that have been released, but thankfully Oda is a little more willing to talk about this. "Well first off, we put effort into not letting all the training *KOF XIV* players put into improving their techniques go to waste, while also providing them with a fun challenge," he says. "The story has really ramped up, while the fights will be even crazier than before. There's more I want to talk about but please wait for further announcements." One feature that has been requested by fans across the world is rollback netcode, and it's one that Oda is happy to confirm. "Right now, it's currently being implemented. However, this is extremely difficult and takes a ton of time. We're doing our very best, so your support means a lot to us."

What's clear from the early footage and images is that The *King Of Fighters XV* looks to be the most visually impressive 3D game from SNK to date, highlighting the team's growing confidence in moving away from the 2D roots of the series. However, a lot remains to be seen. All of the characters revealed so far are returning fighters from past games in the series, so we don't know anything about any new fighters or what their roles may be. The size of the game's character roster is also unknown, though we'd guess that it's quite large as usual, in order to facilitate varied three-on-three battles. Mechanics are wholly unconfirmed, so we can't rule anything out – we could see the return of the divisive Rush Combos, but they could well be gone.

One thing that you should expect, though, is that the game will be built to last. "We're developing this game to be played for many years to come. Of course, that comes with the commitment to support such an endeavour," says Oda. SNK has already demonstrated this model of long-term support a couple of times – *The King Of Fighters XIV* received not only additional DLC characters, but patches to improve online performance and graphics. Then there's the latest *Samurai Shodown* game, which is currently receiving its third batch of DLC two years after the game was originally released.

While it's unfortunate to see the game delayed as it has been, *The King Of Fighters XV* is an exciting prospect that has the potential to boost the series' prominence in both the competitive scene and the public consciousness. The wait may be agonising, but hopefully the final game will show exactly how well SNK's time has been spent. In the meantime, we look forward to learning more about it. *

WHO'S IN?

SO FAR, 22 FIGHTERS HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED FOR THE GAME – HERE'S THE CAST AS IT CURRENTLY STANDS

Team Hero
Shun'ei
Meitenkun
Benimaru Nikaido

Team Sacred Treasures
Kyo Kusanagi
Iori Yagami
Chizuru Kagura

Team Fatal Fury
Terry Bogard
Andy Bogard
Joe Higashi

Team Orochi
Yashiro Nanakase
Shermie
Chris

Team Art Of Fighting
Ryo Sakazaki
Robert Garcia
King

Team Ikari
Ralf Jones
Clark Still
Leona

Plus...
Mai Shiranui
Yuri Sakazaki
Blue Mary
K'

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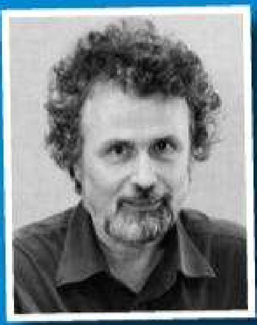
THE EVOLUTION OF

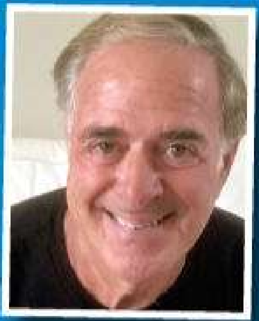
SUMMER

Unlike its joystick-breaking, button-bashing competitors, Summer Games required a degree of strategy. A who's who of former Epyx creatives explain how the classic sports title evolved and influenced the popular Games series

WORDS BY RORY MILNE


Courtesy of Jack Straw Productions/Sherwin Eng.

» While at Starpath, Dennis Caswell helped with the graphics for the game that inspired *Summer Games*.


» Former Epyx CEO Mike Katz saw *Summer Games* as a way to capitalise on the 1984 Olympics.

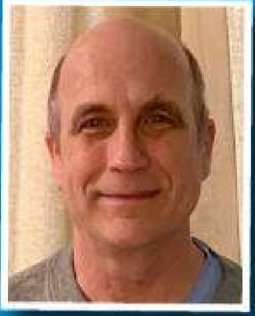
So often the most popular games are refinements of existing ideas rather than entirely original works, and this was certainly the case with the Epyx Olympics-based hit *Summer Games*. That being said, the title that it improved on was a rival's cancelled project rather than a proven concept, as former Epyx CEO Mike Katz points out. "We had many venture capitalists on the board at Epyx and one was a company called Early Stages, who had also made an investment in Starpath. But Starpath started running into problems just as Epyx had gained some steam, so Early Stages suggested a merger, and when I saw Starpath's inventory I got really excited about an Olympic-type game that it had shelved."

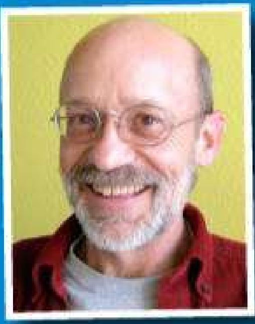
The aspects of the cancelled Atari 2600 title that excited Mike were its multiple events and its timeliness, in so much as Starpath's *Sweat! The Decathlon Game* could be used as a blueprint for a game that could capitalise on the upcoming Olympics. "I loved that Starpath had built-in sustained gameplay and value," Mike enthuses, "and the idea of a multi-event game tied in very well with the Olympics coming up. So we finished that concept, and we added countries and national anthems and flags. We also polished up the events, and made as many of them as possible, and we made each event as much fun as we could."

Not all of the events in Starpath's decathlon game made it into Epyx's Olympic title, however, as the likes of shot put and hurdles weren't a good fit for *Summer Games*. "I would imagine we were going for a combination of the most popular events in terms of those watched on TV and our ability to realistically execute the action in each event that we chose," Mike contemplates. "Dropping two events that were under development for the Starpath game might also have been a matter of disk space or loading time."

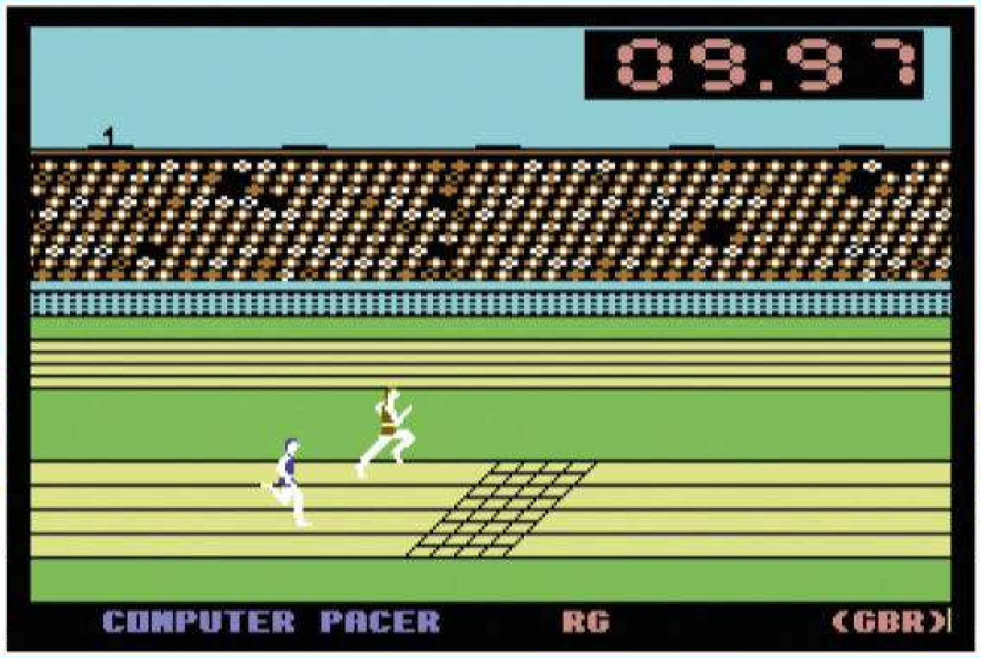
A focus on strategy rather than rapidly alternating between the left and right controls further differentiated *Summer Games* from *Sweat!* – with the exception of the Epyx title's 100-metres dash. "Well it would have been consistent with our *action* strategy, at least in that one event," Mike reasons, "so I don't know if it was a contradiction or if we just thought that it would be interesting to have more strategy in the other events."

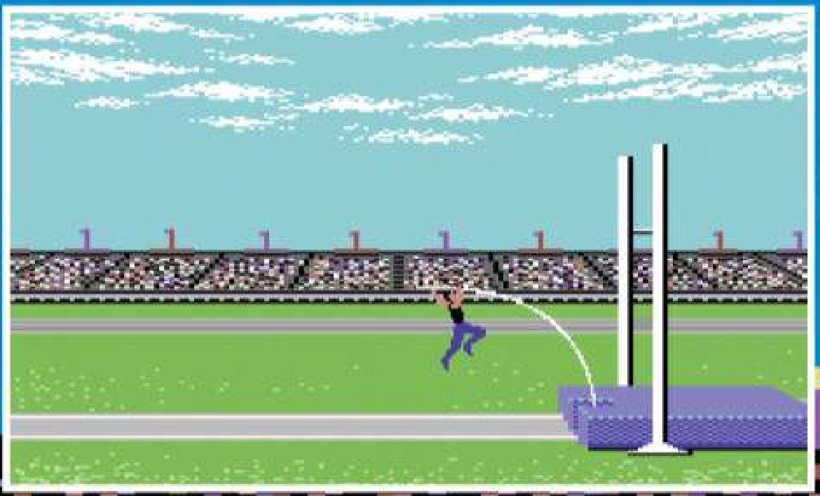
Perhaps the most obvious contrast between *Summer Games* and the decathlon-based


» Chuck Sommerville developed the Apple II *Summer Games* and events for five other *Games* series titles


» Former Epyx producer Matt Householder designed the Epyx hits *World Games* and *California Games*.

» [C64] Unlike *Track & Field*, *Summer Games* had one joystick-destroying event: the 100-metres dash.




» [C64] Success in the pole vault event in *Summer Games* depends on perfect timing and positioning.

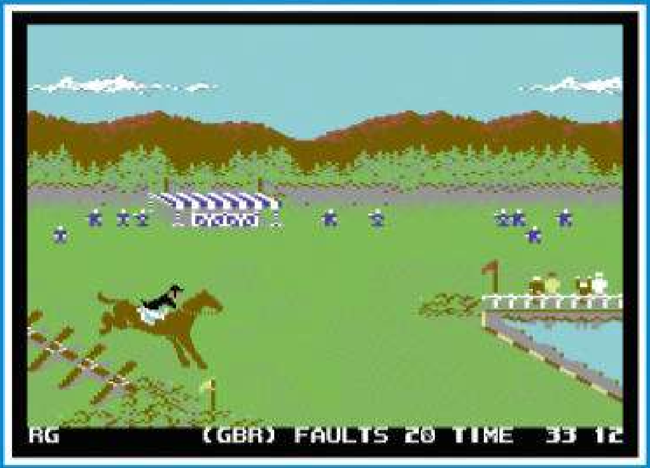
GAMES

Sweat! came down to the former mining the Olympics for events, although Mike makes clear that Epyx did so unofficially. "We couldn't call it *Olympic Games*, obviously," Mike explains, "but we did get away with it, and *Summer Games* really helped turn Epyx into an action-orientated computer game company."

In part due to the success of *Summer Games*, Mike left Epyx for Atari following its release. Meanwhile, coder Chuck Sommerville was hired by the firm thanks to his Apple II conversion of the C64 hit, where he found himself assigned to its sequel. "The marketing department said Epyx was going to do *Summer Games II*, and then the head engineer said we had to make something out of it!" Chuck grins. "So we just picked events that we thought would be fun, because we were acutely aware of the connection between people enjoying a game and its sales."

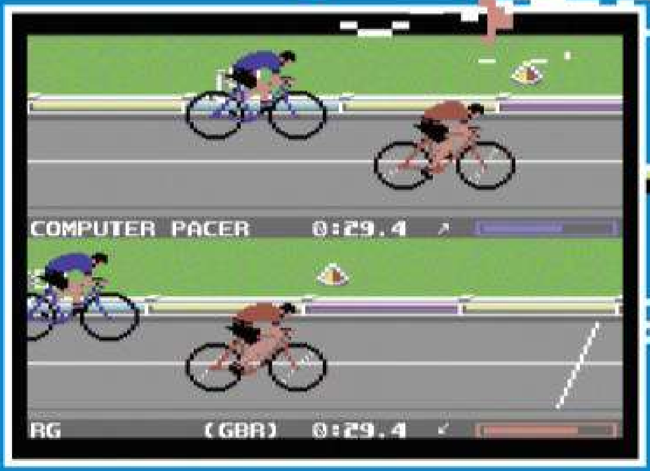
The approach *Summer Games II*'s developers took was to double down on the strategic elements of the original game, which had the result of giving players sequences of controls to remember for its more complex events. "I didn't play much equestrian, that was done by Kevin Norman," Chuck remembers. "Its complicated controls were just down to his design – I think he was just deeper into the strategy than the action."

By comparison, the events Chuck worked on for *Summer Games II* were simple to control, but his rowing and cycling involved just as much strategy as the equestrian. "The easy thing to do for a cycling event would have been to just turn it into a joystick buster, where you went as fast as you could," Chuck considers. "But I wanted there to be more strategy involved. I realised that when you rode a bicycle you had to come up to speed, so I designed the event so that when the player's ▶



» [C64] There are a lot of moves to remember in *Summer Games II*'s equestrian, so keep your manual handy.

> "The idea of a multi-event game tied in very well with the Olympics coming up. So we added countries and national anthems and flags"
>
> **MIKE KATZ**



» [C64] The atypical controls in *Summer Games II*'s cycling event require you to rotate the joystick.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

SWEAT! THE DECATHLON GAME

DENNIS CASWELL ON THE ATARI 2600 TITLE THAT INSPIRED SUMMER GAMES

Which games influenced Starpath's *Sweat! The Decathlon Game*?

I remember that *Microsoft Decathlon* – which ran on the Apple II – was popular among the Starpath staff, and it was occasionally played in the office. So I assume that *Sweat! The Decathlon Game* took some of its inspiration from that. Konami's *Track & Field* may have been an influence as well, but I don't know for sure.

How did *Sweat!* benefit from being a Starpath Supercharger game?

The Supercharger offered two advantages. The first was increased memory capacity; the second was that the memory in the Supercharger was RAM instead of ROM. This enabled multi-load games, in which new levels could be loaded from cassette as the game progressed.

Was *Sweat!* a team effort like *Summer Games* or a solo project?

To the best of my recollection, Scott Nelson was working on it by himself, although I could easily be mistaken about that. I know for sure that I wasn't involved on a day-to-day basis, but I did help with the production of the graphics on at least one occasion.

Why do you think that hurdling and shot put didn't make it into *Summer Games* when Starpath had already done the work to translate those particular events into videogame form for *Sweat!*?

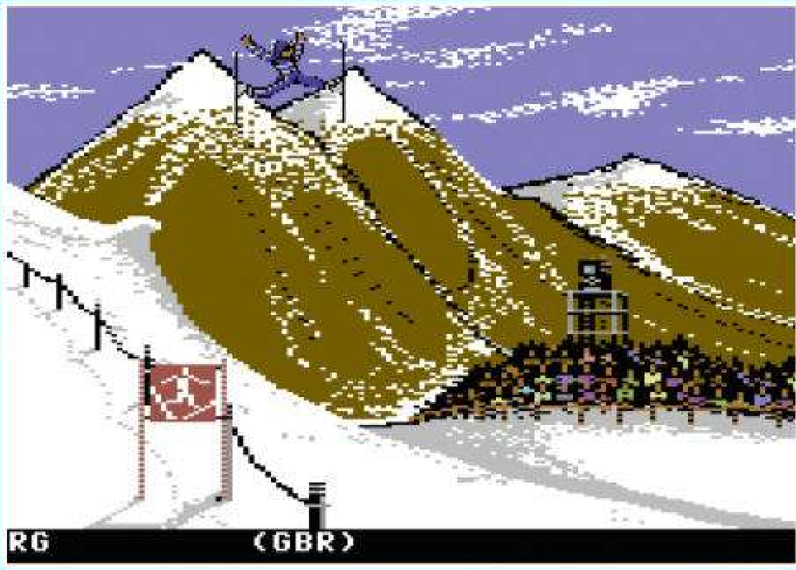
I recall that the shot put event in *Microsoft Decathlon* was frustratingly difficult to control, so perhaps that convinced people that the shot put just isn't much fun. That's pure speculation, though!

joystick was a little bit ahead of where the peddles were they would speed up. But if they weren't in sync then the bike would slow down, so you had to actually think about it a bit more than just going crazy with the joystick."

A year after its predecessor's launch, *Summer Games II* was released into a crowded marketplace of multi-event titles, where brisk sales ensured a follow-up. Although a sequel was already underway, as former producer Matt Householder notes. "Epyx management realised while it was still working on *Summer Games II* internally that it needed to get *Winter Games* started," Matt recalls, "so they went to an outside group, and Action Graphics was available. I came in as a producer, and I did a little design, but just in the last few months."

Of the events chosen for *Winter Games*, one stood out from those in the previous Epyx *Games* titles, in that hot dog skiing was a non-Olympic event that was about showing off as much as chasing medals. "Hot dog skiing was Bob Ogden's idea, he was the founder of Action Graphics," Matt recollects. "He did a lot of skiing, and he would see other skiers doing these stunts, and I think he was inspired by that. The other events were more traditional Winter Olympic sports, but hot dog skiing was just like this stunt-based event that in a lot of ways was an inspiration for what came later."

A second event in *Winter Games* continued this shift away from established sports, while at the same time allowing Action Graphics to make two challenges out of one. "Figure skating was a compulsory event, meaning there were certain things you had to perform in your routine," Matt says of the better known activity, "Where as free skating was more artistic; probably a bit more like hot dog skiing. So that was another step in the direction of a non-traditional event. The secret sauce was that they used the same graphics – they just had slightly different code!"



» [C64] It wasn't an Olympic event when *Winter Games* came out, but freestyle skiing is a great inclusion.

Although quite distinct, Matt remembers an alternative to one of the two skating events being discussed, which was canned due to *Winter Games* being multi-format. "Action Graphics programmer Richard Ditton said that if he had done slalom he would have wanted to do it with a 3D perspective," Matt reveals. "But he didn't think the machines were capable of doing a presentable job of that, especially the Apple II – and *Winter Games* had to be on the Apple II as well as the Commodore 64."

But despite this omission, *Winter Games* sold better than either *Summer Games* title. Naturally, Epyx continued its series, but of all places it looked to TV for inspiration. "The idea was down to a market-driven reality," Matt says of *World Games*, "which was that the Olympics were over for four more years. So we had a meeting, and someone said we should do something like ABC's *Wide World Of Sports*, where you would play games around the world."

With two exceptions, the events Matt picked for *World Games* shifted the focus of the *Games* series from Olympic to alternative sports, and Epyx backed his decision. "I don't think anyone was really worried about the different direction," Matt reckons, "and if they were

> "Hot dog skiing was this stunt-based event that in a lot of ways was an inspiration for what came later"
>
> **MATT HOUSEHOLDER**

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

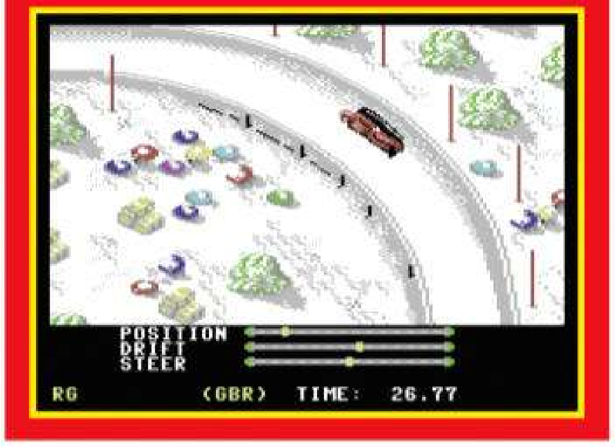
THE GAMES WINTER EDITION

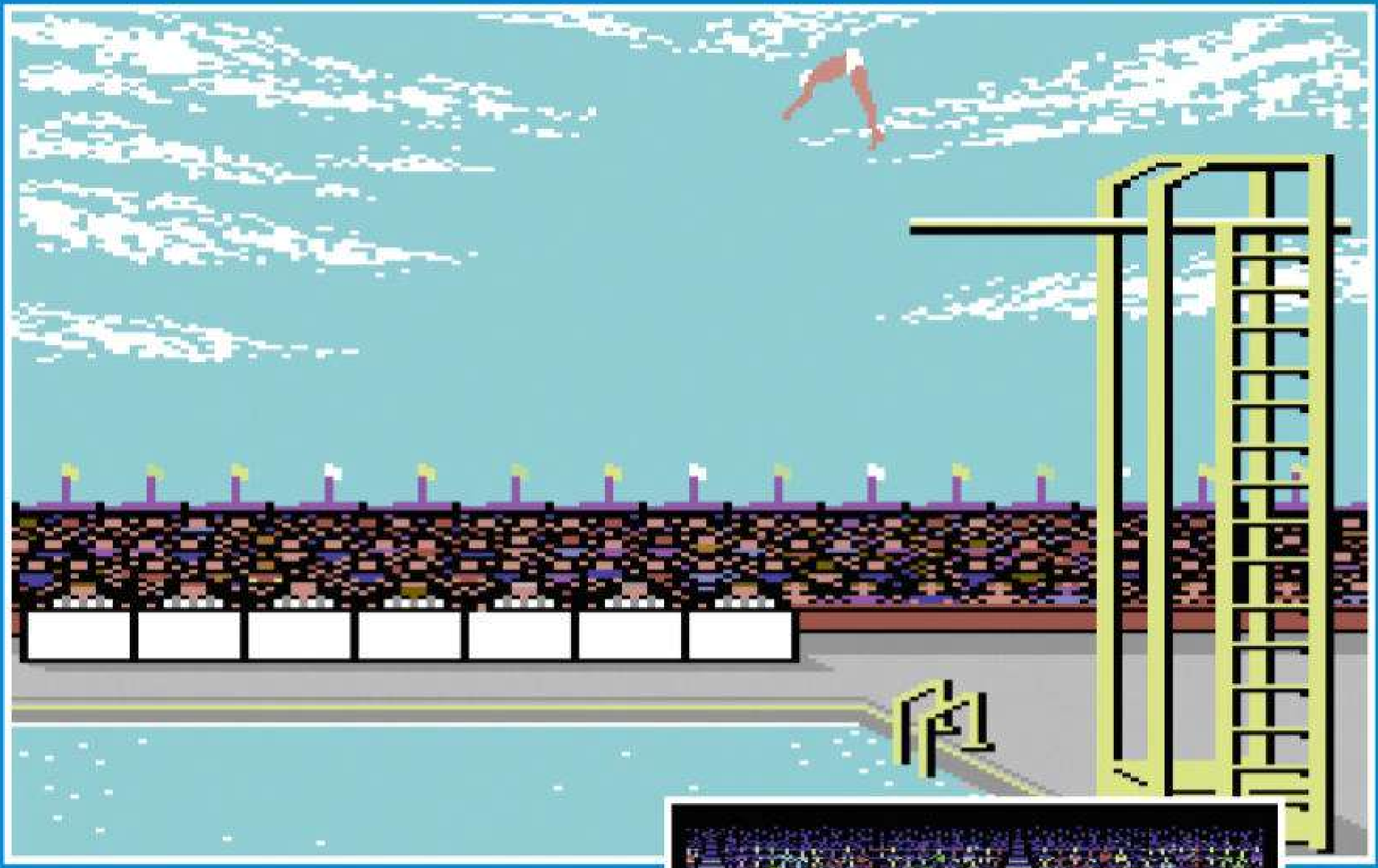
CHUCK SOMMERVILLE'S MEMORIES OF THE WINTER GAMES REBOOT

Why was the luge event in *The Games Winter Edition* so forgiving?
I had Epyx find someone who competed in the luge in the Olympics, and he became my consultant. I learned from our conversations that one of the important things was that you had to have very careful control of the line you took, and that the difference between a good time and a bad time was very slim. So I took that to heart in my design, and I may have made it too realistic.

How did the sequel's two-player mode end up being evenly split between simultaneous and turn-based events?
It really depended on what the events were, and whether or not we thought we could make a better event with one or two player characters on-screen. There was a simultaneous downhill skiing event that had diagonal scrolling, and the programmer on that struggled to get it to work. Because the two skiers were never allowed to overlap vertically, but they needed to stay on-screen with a dividing line.

Why were the many events in the follow-up depicted in various different perspectives, rather than all being side-on – like those in *Winter Games*?
It could just be that our pixel artists had gotten better since *Winter Games*, although they wouldn't have a say over the perspectives used in the events. It could also be that our tech got better, because we had to do compression of everything, and maybe our techniques for compressing graphics had improved.





» [C64] Although not an obvious choice for a videogame, the diving in *Summer Games* is a fun challenge.

I just ignored them, because it was pretty clear to me that these were a whole bunch of events that widened the multi-event games that Epyx could produce."

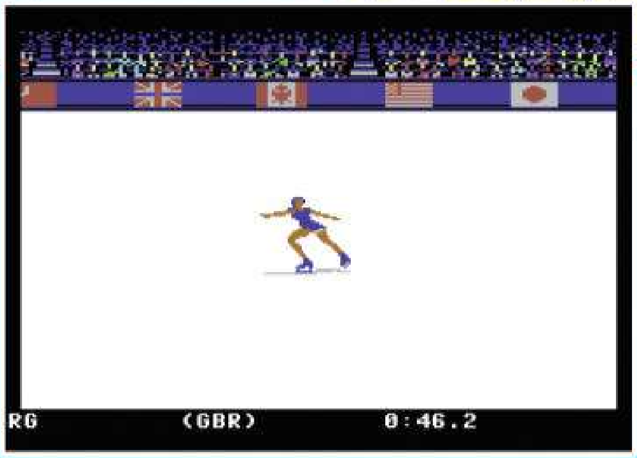
As well as moving away from the Olympics, *World Games* also adopted a less serious tone than previous *Games* series titles, although this wasn't without precedent. "I think it was a bit of the spirit from the hot dog skiing in *Winter Games*, because there were some pretty silly crash landings in that! I also remember we went to see the Scottish Games here in the East Bay, and we watched people do the caber toss. Then we promptly went back and did something different – and made the contestants dance afterwards!"

The third aspect of the *Games* series to change with *World Games* was its approach to health and safety – which simply didn't exist in some of its more extreme activities. "Cliff diving was probably the most dangerous event," Matt ponders, "where you dived into the water and could bounce off the cliff! I watched that on *Wide World Of Sports*, so I decided we were going to do that. Bull riding too, I picked that. Those were somewhat cartoony events, although others had interesting cultural touch points. Like log rolling, I could put that in Canada."

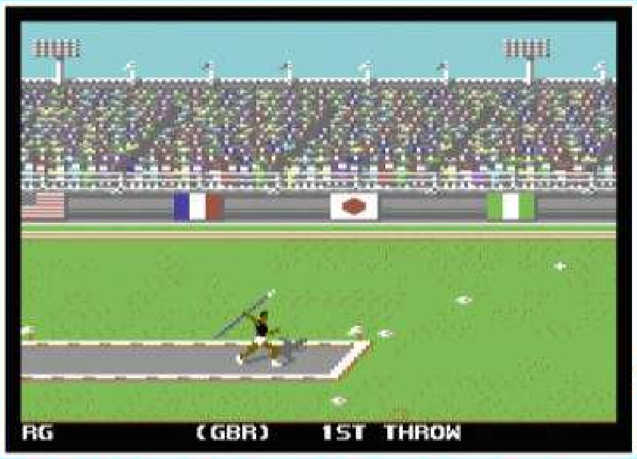
For some reason, *World Games* went down far better in the UK than the US, but its alternative and extreme sports gave Matt an idea for a decidedly American follow-up. "It was pretty much an epiphany – a flash," Matt says of designing *California Games*. "It had to have all of these activities that our target market of mostly males liked to do. So I wrote a pitch document that I called Rad Sports, and everybody was very happy about it – even the programmers, who all wanted to work on it."

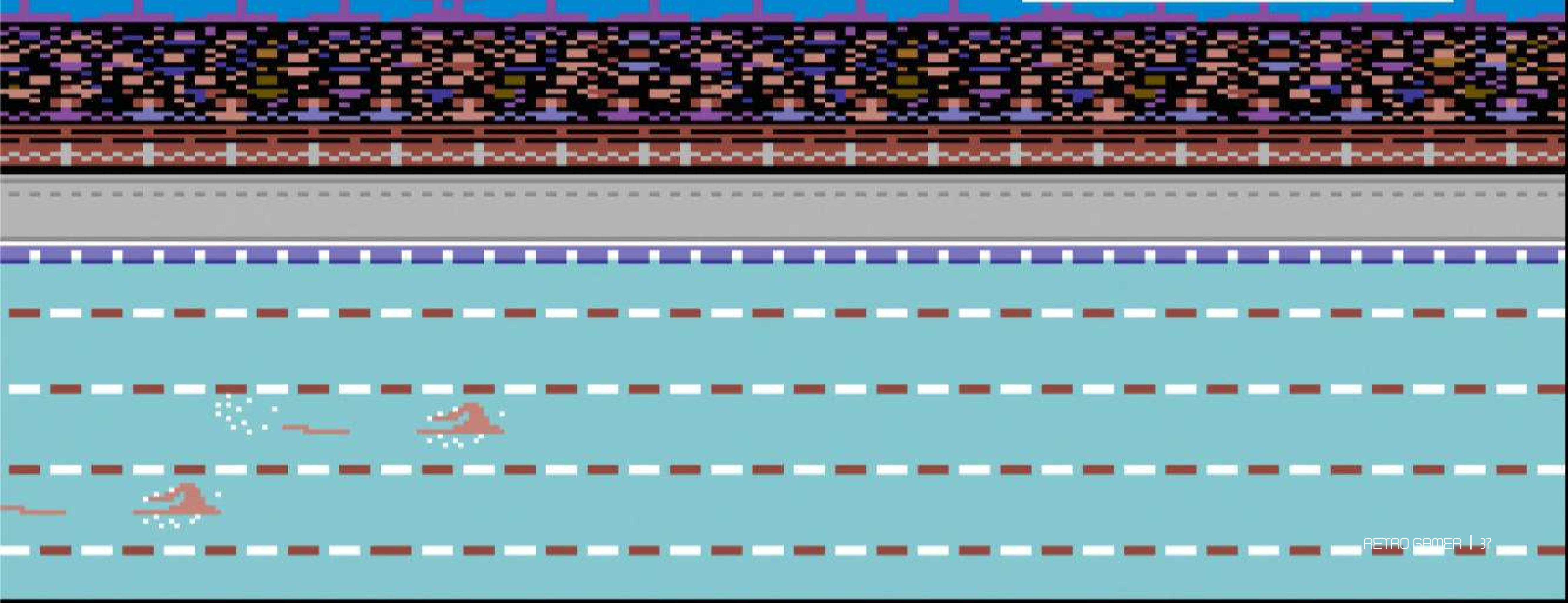
One such programmer was Chuck Sommerville, who has fond memories of working on *California Games* and researching some of its events. "*California Games* was near and dear to my heart," Chuck says with a smile, "because as a group we all lived in California, and we were developing events that we actually *did*. We would even go out to the parking lot and play Hacky Sack, just to understand that event, and we threw Frisbees at each other!"

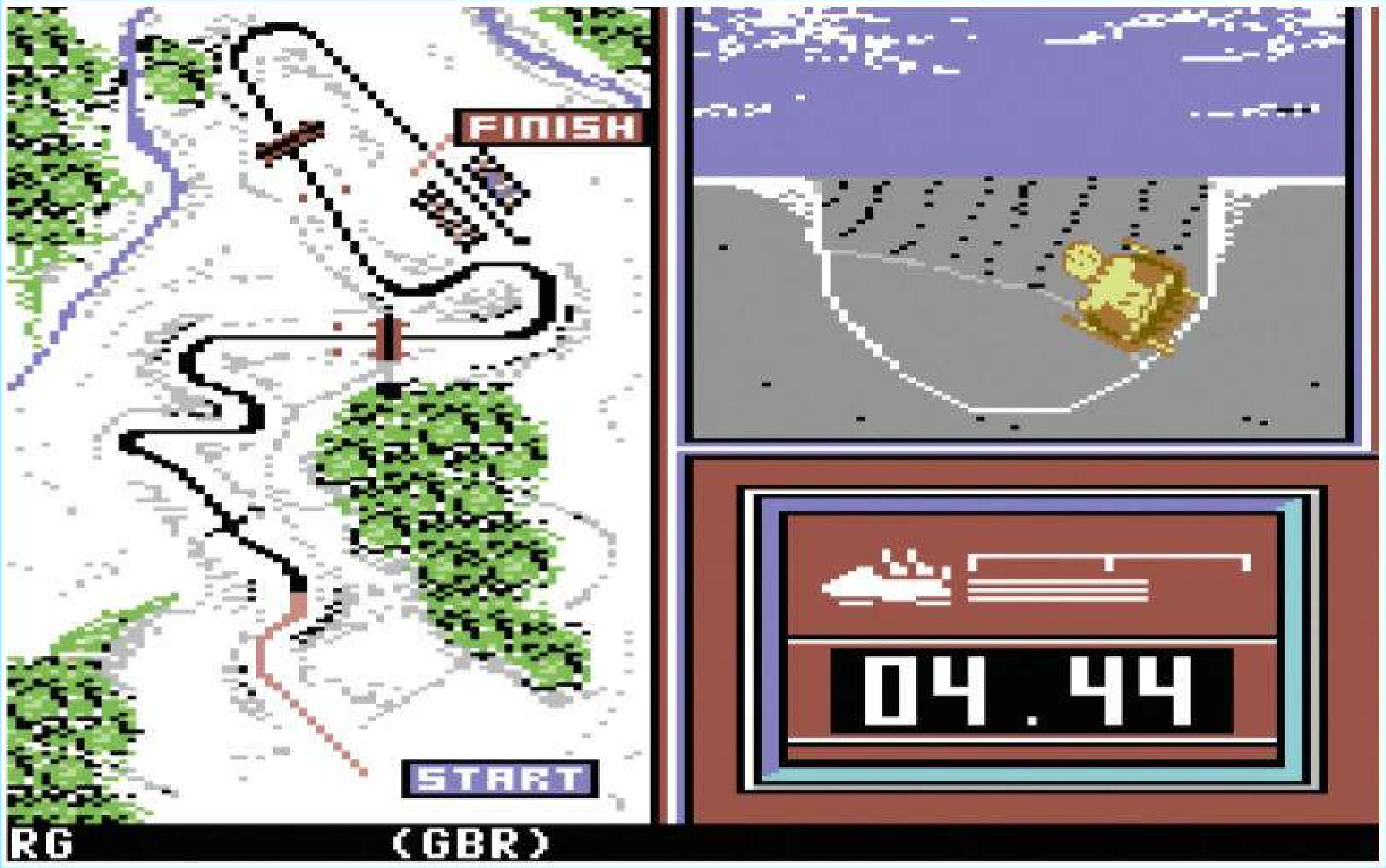
Considering *California Games* had a remit for dangerous activities, Hacky Sack and Frisbee seemed like odd choices, but producer Matt Householder liked them for their authenticity. "Yeah, flying disk was pretty harmless," Matt admits, "unless you jumped and hurt yourself, which you could do! But we knew that it rounded out the notion that these were *Californian* games. Because Frisbee was something people did in California, roller-skating was something you did in San ▶



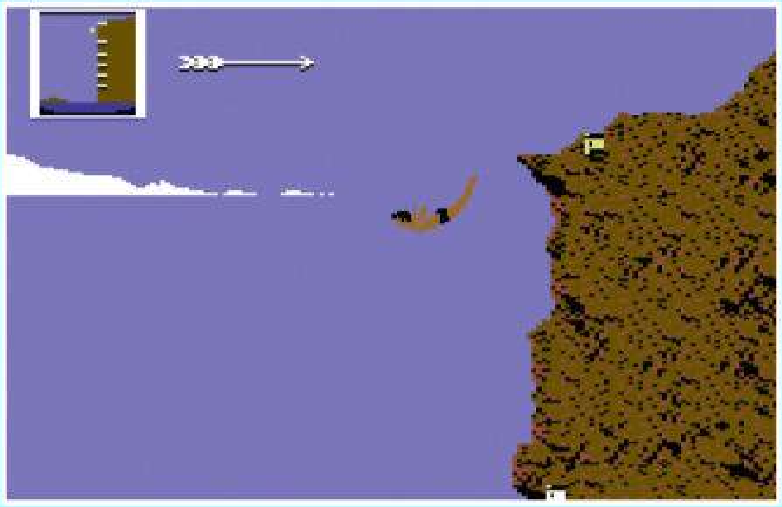
» [C64] The figure skating in *Winter Games* works well, but it's overly similar to the free skating event.



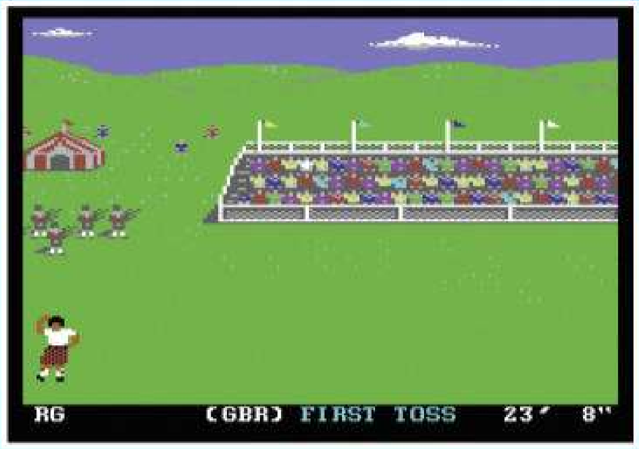




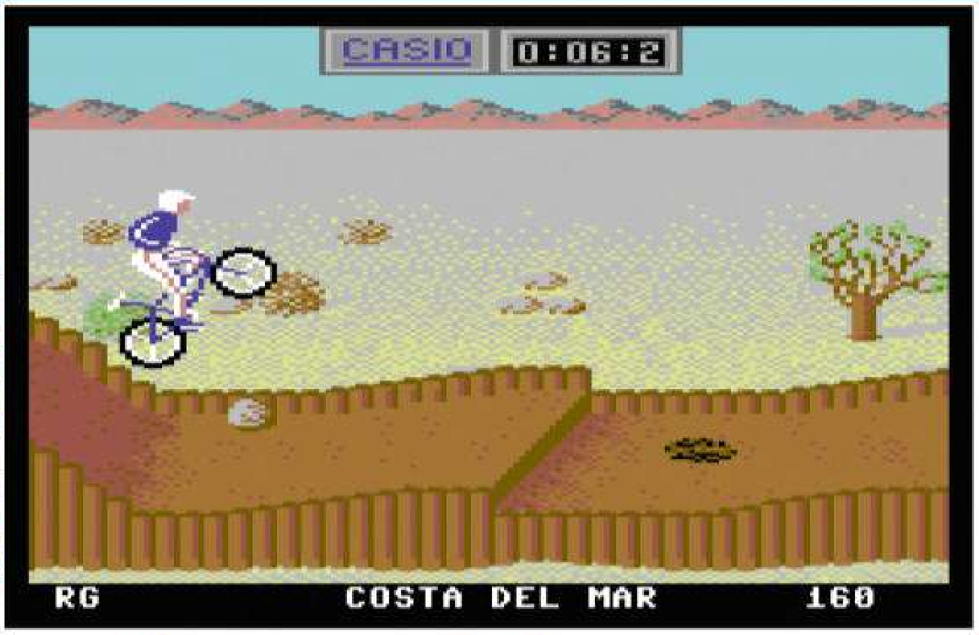
» [C64] The third-person perspective bobsled in *Winter Games* set a precedent for events in later *Games* titles.



» [C64] *World Games* brought extreme sports such as cliff diving and bull riding to the *Games* series.



» [C64] Humour became a big part of the *Games* series with *World Games*, which included dancing caber tossers.



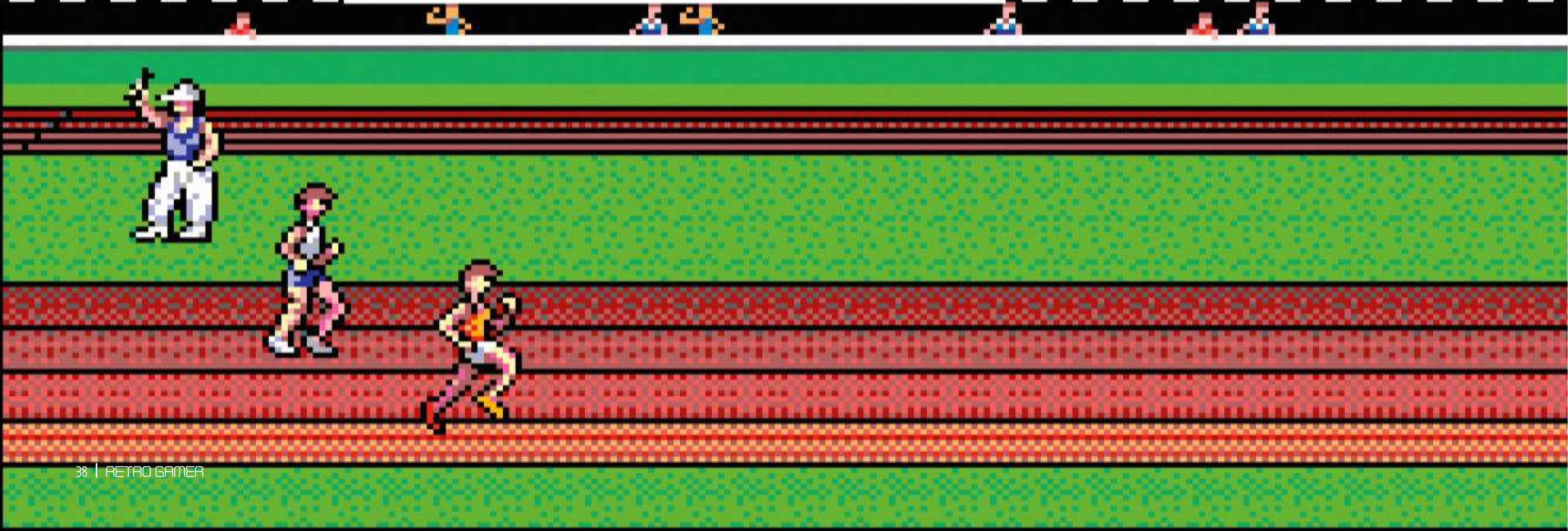
» [C64] For the most part, *California Games* is fun in the sun, but its BMX racing is far from risk-free.

▶ Francisco and Hacky Sack was a very hippy thing to do at Californian colleges."

These novel pastimes aside, *California Games* celebrated alternative sports such as half-pipe and surfing, which were the respective hobbies of the events' coders Chuck Sommerville and Jon Leupp. "I found it tough to get something that matched the feeling of actually doing the half-pipe, and maybe it was a little too realistic, because it was pretty hard!" Chuck exclaims. "But in my opinion, the very best event was surfing, which was by Jon Leupp. He was a surfer himself, and was from Hawaii, so he knew surfing really, really well, and he did an amazing job of that in *California Games*."

As well as assigning events to coders with a passion for them, Matt Householder made further efforts to capture the essence of the sports in *California Games* by making them exhibitions as much as competitions, where the player was in control. "Every event in *California Games* was an individual doing their thing in front of an audience," Matt observes. "So performing, showing off! There was also an effort to make the controls feel natural. We'd test them, try them out and give feedback, and their intuitiveness was probably improved by the proximity of the art department to our programmers."

To say that the *California Games* team's efforts paid off would be an understatement; their game was a massive hit on multiple systems. Matt left Epyx soon after, but three years later a bankrupt Epyx tempted him back to rescue its *California Games* sequel. "I think that half of the events were done, and we finished two or three more and just shipped



> "California Games was near and dear to my heart, because as a group we all lived in California, and we were developing events that we actually did"
>
> **CHUCK SOMMERVILLE**

it," Matt sighs. "We would find disks, and people's computers with disks in them, and we salvaged a lot of stuff. So if an event was halfway there then we patched it up, put it on a disk and sent it out. The jet ski was kind of interesting, and the hang-gliding – that was meant to be a spiritual successor to surfing."

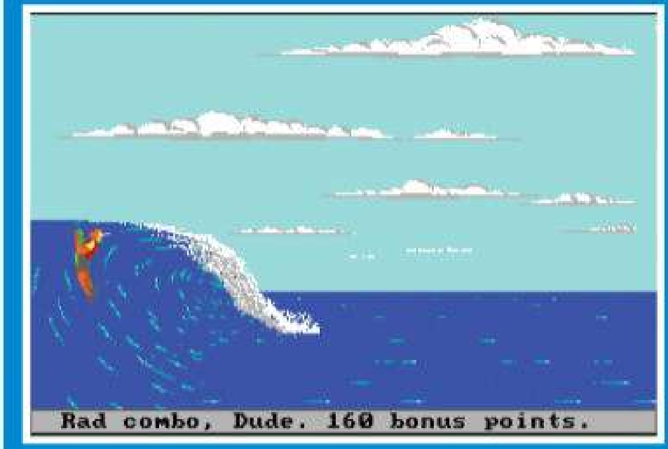
One of the few coders still at Epyx following its bankruptcy was Chuck Sommerville, who didn't work on *California Games II* but has some informed theories on its events. "Hang-gliding and bodyboarding fell into the extreme sports category, and I'm thinking that's why Epyx wanted them in the sequel," Chuck speculates. "It's also quite possible that they were chosen for *California Games II* simply because a lot of the events that were ideally suited to be in a videogame were in *California Games*."

Sadly, it wasn't just *California Games II*'s events that weren't ideal. The sequel's humour seemed off, particularly its depiction of dead contestants in graves, as Matt Householder concurs. "That made me feel weird," Matt cringes. "I think it was gallows humour, as some people who were working on it knew that the 'end was nigh' for Epyx, and they just expressed it that way."

With jobs at stake, Matt worked with what he had to get *California Games II* released, but despite a few good reviews it didn't sell well enough to save Epyx. "*California Games II* wasn't that bad," Matt reflects, "but it wasn't something I was proud to ship. It may have been that the multi-events sports boom was over to some degree, or maybe *California Games* had been the ultimate."

When asked about the potential of the Epyx *Games* series, Matt unsurprisingly focuses on *California Games*, and suggests the concept would work well as an esport. "I think a natural way to go would be a competitive *California Games* sports league," Matt muses. "You'd have entry fees and purses, and contests where the winners would get cash prizes and goods."

On the enduring popularity of *Summer Games*, its driving force – Mike Katz – thinks it played to the crowd and offers something for everyone. "It was sports and was timely," Mike reviews, "so I think we were going after a pretty broad audience. But what I love about *Summer Games* is that it offers multiple events that involve action and strategy." ✱



Rad combo, Dude. 160 bonus points.

» [Amiga] *California Games II*'s bodyboarding isn't bad, but it lacks the charm of its predecessor's surfing.

RG
(GBR)
TARGETS: 3
HITS: 2

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:

THE GAMES SUMMER EDITION

CHUCK SOMMERVILLE DISCUSSES HOW EPYX REVISITED SUMMER GAMES

Why were so many of *The Games Summer Edition*'s events based on rapidly moving the joystick to and fro?

Epyx had come out with the 500 XJ joystick around that time, which was one of the best joysticks for the Commodore 64 I ever used. It was very durable, and it played the *Games* series games beautifully.

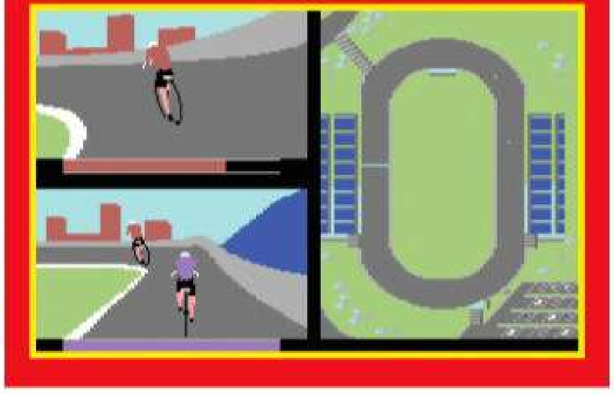
So it could have been that having 500 XJs in our hands fed into *Summer Edition* having so many events with those controls; just because we had great joysticks.

What do you remember about the sequel's velodrome event?

The 3D track was really cutting edge for the Commodore 64, and the way that was done was by generating sequences on an Amiga. The track was individual frames rendered with a 3D package, which were then broken down into bitmaps. We then replaced the character set on the fly to get that motion, and it was a pretty big deal to get that to happen.

How did Epyx's developers feel about the *Games* series by the time of *The Games Summer Edition*?

There was an Easter egg that addressed that point. If you watched the credits long enough it would say thanks for playing the *Games* series, and then list all of the games. Then after that it would start listing joke games like *Bummer Games*, *Bummer Games II* and *Invasion Of The Games*! The programmers were basically making fun of marketing inventing more *Games* series games to be done!

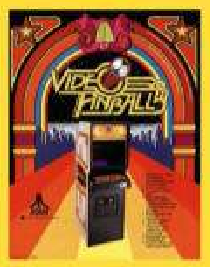


THE MAKING OF

VIDEO PINBALL
© Atari Inc. 1978
ATARI®

BEFORE ED LOGG FOUND FAME WITH ASTEROIDS, HE CREATED A GROUNDBREAKING COIN-OP, WHICH PROVED VERY SPECIAL WHEN LIT

Words by Paul Drury



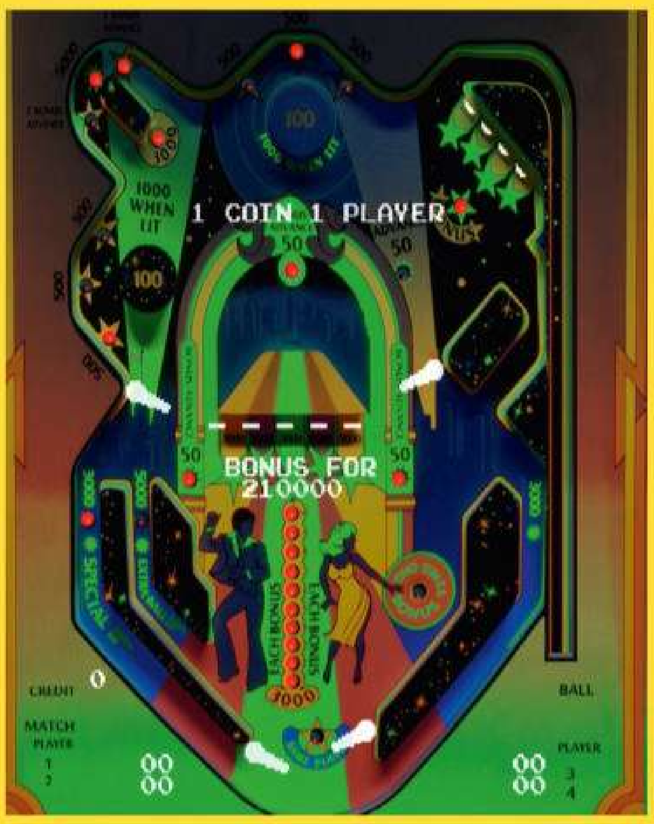
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI INC
- » **DEVELOPER:** ATARI INC
- » **RELEASED:** 1978
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** VIDEO PINBALL

» Ed Logg – Atari's 'Golden Boy'.

In the late-Seventies, Atari wanted it all. Not content with kickstarting the whole coin-op videogame business at the start of the decade, it had moved into the home market, producing the Atari VCS console and was planning for its own series of microcomputers. It had even launched its own pinball division, with its first table, *The Atarians*, hitting arcades in 1977 so it is perhaps unsurprising that Atari decided to combine two of its ventures into one, genre-launching project.

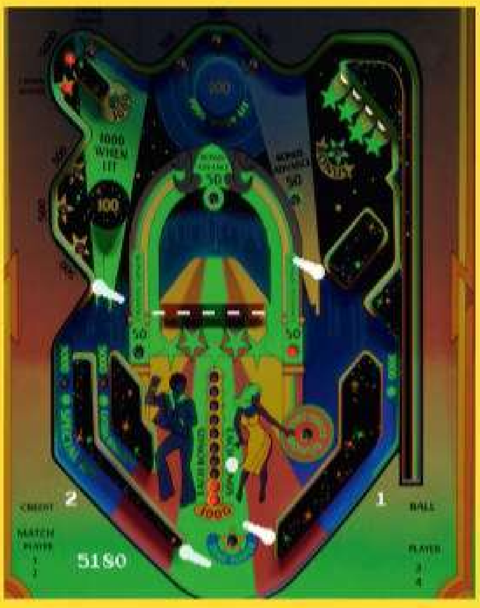
"The engineer that had me work on *Video Pinball* was the same engineer who was working on our widebody pinball machines: Dave Stubben," explains coder Ed Logg. "He was my boss at the time and said he wanted me to do this game because there are places where we could put a videogame where we couldn't put a pinball machine. That was his impetus… and I really wasn't sure it was a good idea."



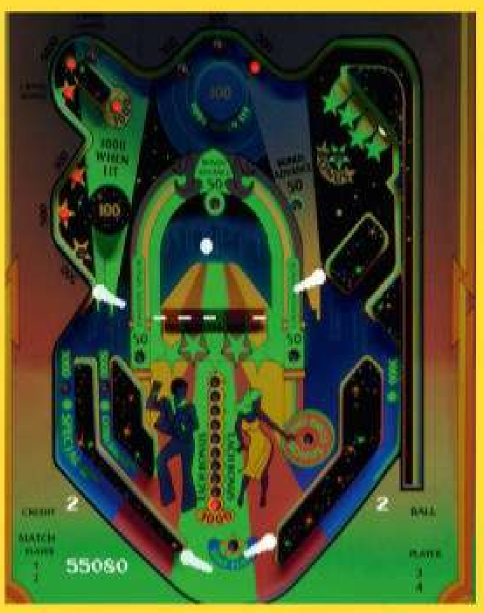
» [Arcade] *Video Pinball* has an authentic plunger on the front of the cabinet to launch your ball into play, testament to Atari's efforts to replicate the feel of a real pinball table.

Ed at least had some experience of getting a ball bouncing around a screen. He had joined Atari in 1978 and he was soon tasked with updating one of its past blockbusters. *Super Breakout* added new modes to the brick-breaking gameplay and gave Ed his first commercial success. "I took virtually no code from *Super Breakout* at all, though," Ed notes. "That game had a square [for the ball] but now I'd managed to create a round object. The collisions were really different in *Video Pinball*, so for example, when the ball hits a surface, there's spin. It comes off it at a different angle. I took a huge amount of time doing the physics [for the game]. That was the real problem – getting all the collision detection right for all the different types of surfaces and angles. It was 8-bit hardware so it wasn't easy but I got it done… and it worked!"

The believable ball movement, with inertia, gravity and a satisfying burst of speed when your flipper connects cleanly, immediately set Ed's game apart from earlier *Pong*-based efforts, like Ramtek's *Clean Sweep*. With this essential element in place, Ed set about bringing other key features to the table. "I did have a checklist," he says. "I was given a playfield, more or less, so from that I could see what I needed to get



» [Arcade] The playfield is full of period detail – those disco dancers scream Studio 54.



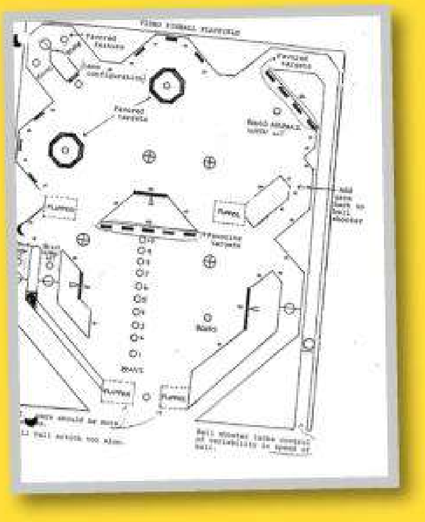
» [Arcade] Clever use of a half-silvered mirror inside the cabinet creates a beautifully lit playfield.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ASTEROIDS
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1976

GAUNTLET (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1985

WAYNE GRETSKY'S 3D HOCKEY
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1996



in. I needed drop down targets, bumpers, LEDs that lit up when you accomplished certain things and all these different types of surfaces. The nudge panel was an interesting concept – that idea you could do the same thing on a videogame as you could on a real table. Give it that little nudge…"

Yes, along with many of the established features you would expect to see on a real pinball machine, *Video Pinball* even allowed you to press the control panel down to simulate a well-timed shove of the machine – the plea written onto the cabinet for players to do this 'gently' feels charmingly naïve. Yet some intriguing options did not make the cut. "The hardware only had four pieces to make a ball so a single ball was all I could do," says Ed. "Multiball was out of the question until we got to hardware that allowed more moving objects. One thing Dave and I did consider was being able to put in a new EPROM [into an existing *Video Pinball* cabinet] and that would create a whole new playfield. The machine uses a half-silvered mirror so you would have to change the artwork as well as the programming [for a new table] but it was certainly something we could have done… but it didn't happen. I guess we didn't sell enough to make it worthwhile."

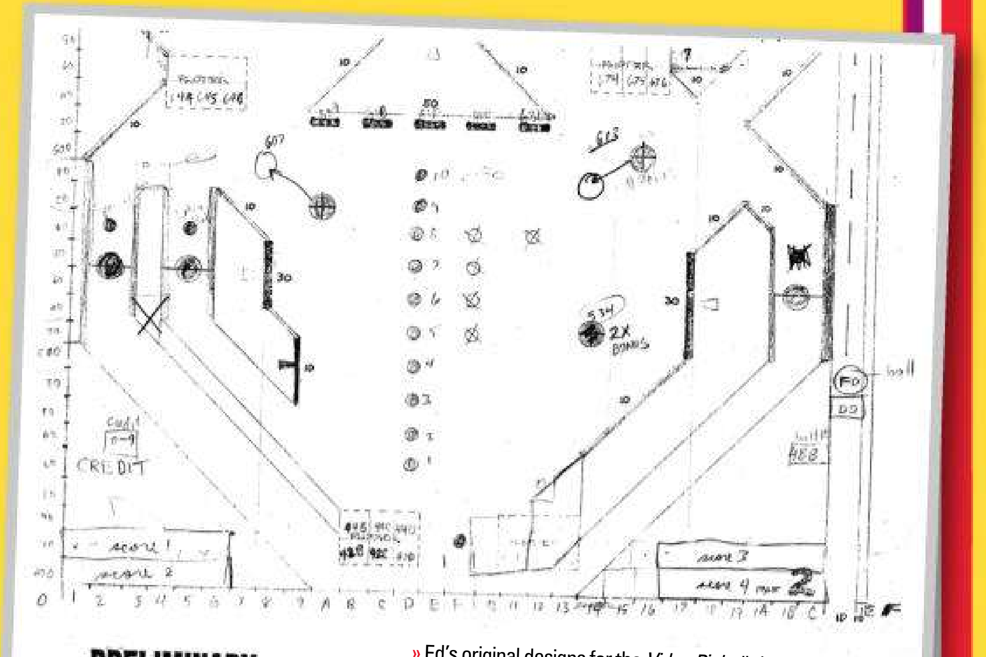
The idea of being able to swap new tables in and out of a single cabinet predates modern projects like PinMAME by several decades and shows just how forward-thinking Atari was. Ed also alludes to what makes *Video Pinball* such an innovative and beautiful machine – the ingenious use of that half-silvered mirror. The playfield art, featuring a pair of funky disco dancers strutting their stuff, is actually on the roof of the cabinet, and is best described not so much as an overlay but an 'over-projection'. The effect is impressive and we cannot help wondering if Ed himself was the model for the dude getting down on the dance floor? "I was not a disco guy," he says, deadpan. "I don't remember having feelings either way about the art. And no, that's not me wearing those flares."

The game was a modest success, with Atari selling around 1,500 cabinets, which Ed admits was "not as many as I would have liked". The disappointment was soon forgotten as Ed's next released title was *Asteroids*, which would go on to be the company's best-selling coin-op, shifting over 70,000 machines. Ed became Atari's 'Golden Boy', producing such hits as *Centipede*, *Xybots* and *Gauntlet*, yet he acknowledges *Video Pinball* was a small but important step in his game-making career, as well as pioneering a videogame genre still going strong over four decades later.

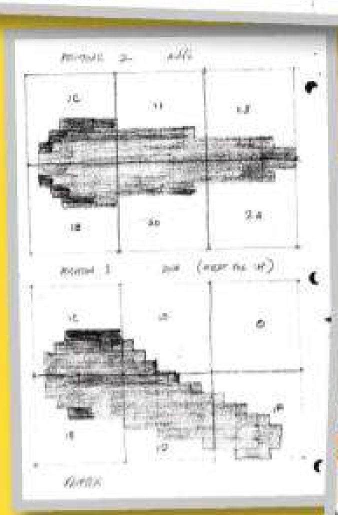
"It was an interesting learning experience," he smiles. "I learned a lot about physics, what I could and couldn't do. I often wonder if Bill Budge's *Pinball Construction Set* was at all inspired by what we had done with *Video Pinball*. I sure hope it was!"

Special thanks

Thanks to Ed for sharing his original game design documents and Martyn Carroll for additional help. *



» Ed's original designs for the *Video Pinball* playfield – he has a folder full of such relics from the Golden Age of the arcade.



» Ed's original pencil sketches for the flipper positions.

» Collector Alex Crowley managed to find this original cab in an abandoned arcade in rural France. (Photo courtesy of Tony Temple.)

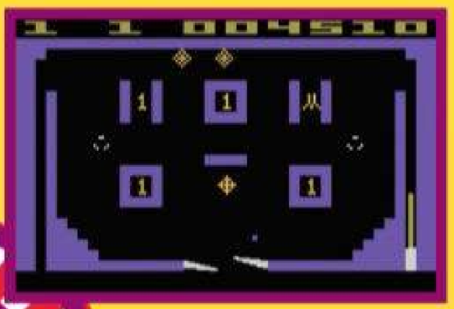
> "I WAS NOT A DISCO GUY. THAT'S NOT ME WEARING THOSE FLARES"
> **ED LOGG**

PIXELATED PINBALL

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GENRE

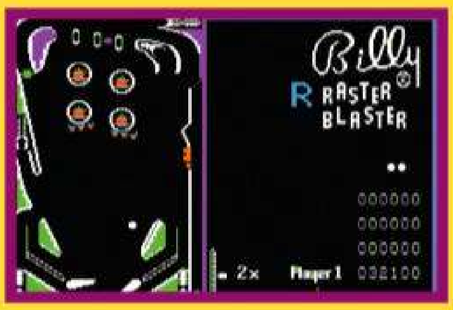
VIDEO PINBALL (ATARI 2600, 1980)

■ Atari had actually produced a standalone console of the same name back in 1977, a skit on *Breakout* with a decidedly odd control system. This home version, coded by the talented Bob Smith, has more realistic flippers and some rudimentary ball physics.



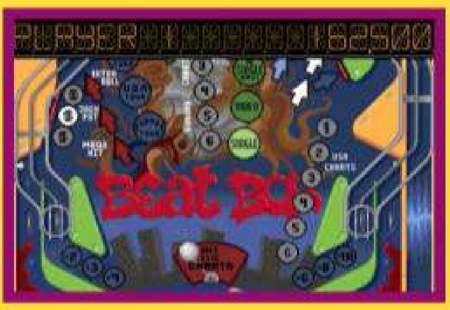
RASTER BLASTER (APPLE II, 1981)

■ Bill Budge set the standard when it came to early home versions of pinball. Not only did this title play exceptionally well, it allowed players to design their own tables, leading to the release of *Pinball Construction Set* the following year.



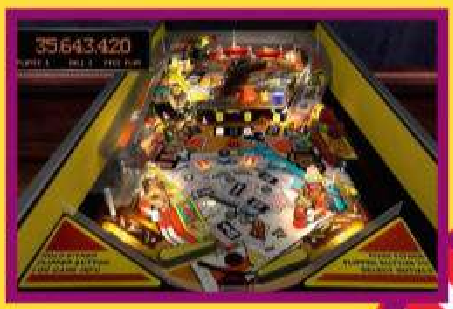
PINBALL DREAMS (AMIGA, 1992)

■ The game that brought the joys of digital pinball into the 16-bit era. Four brilliant and distinct tables were included in the original release and it spawned the excellent sequel *Pinball Fantasies* as well as *Pinball Illusions* later in the decade.



PINBALL ARCADE (PC, 2012)

■ The ability to play some of the finest tables from such stellar pinball manufacturers as Stern and Gottlieb still thrills us a decade on. Our editor Darran can often be found glued to the Switch version, when he's not playing *Strider* or slagging off *Dig Dug*.

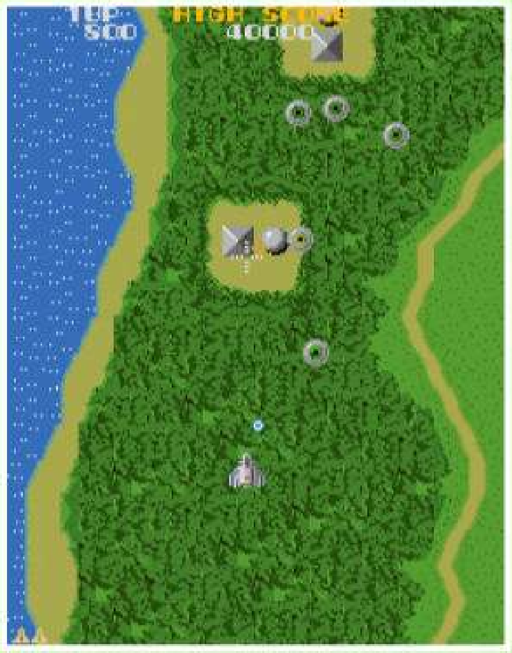


ULTIMATE GUIDE

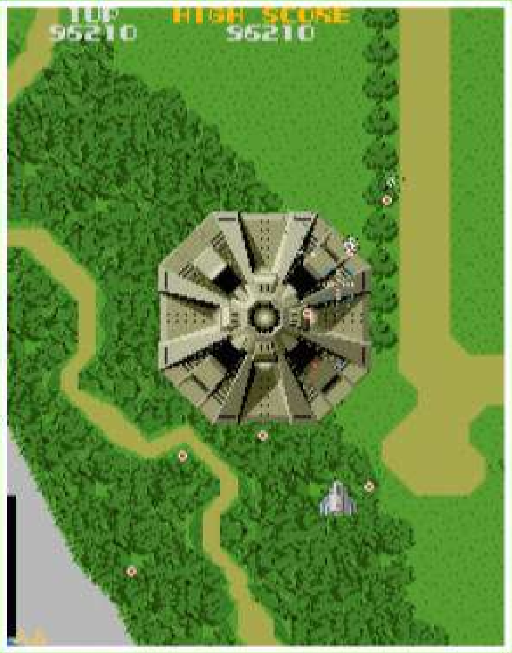
XEVIOUS

THE INVADING ALIENS ARE BACK! AND THIS TIME THEY'RE FASTER, MEANER AND BIGGER! FORTUNATELY THE EARTH HAS YOU TO CALL ON ONCE MORE. JUMP IN YOUR ADVANCED SOLVALOU CRAFT AND TAKE OUT THE ENEMY FORCES BOTH IN THE AIR AND ON THE GROUND IN RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO NAMCO'S REVOLUTIONARY SHOOT-'EM-UP

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON



» [Arcade] The familiar dual threat of land and sky enemies awaits the Solvalou.



» [Arcade] The Andor Genesis, one of the arcade's most memorable bosses.

Ever since *Space Invaders* first took over the world in the late-Seventies, alien invasions have dominated videogames, and the shoot-'em-up genre in particular. The appeal is obvious: a lone defender, protecting mankind from a destructive force bent on eradicating all that stand in its way. As with Taito's classic, it's a forlorn hope given the endless and constant stream of enemies that await the valiant hero. Yet unlike *Space Invaders*, *Defender*, *Galaga* and so on, *Xevious* gives you a beautifully verdant Earth-like landscape to jet over, a constant reminder of why you are taking on such a perilous mission.

In 1981, Japanese arcade producer Namco was still riding high with its smash dot-munching hit, *Pac-Man*. Keen to build on this success, the company placed designer Masanobu Endo in charge of its latest game. The result was a powerful upgrade on the majority of shoot-'em-ups of the time which were often stagnant one-screen affairs. In *Xevious*, the player is once more charged with defending the Earth from an invading force, the eponymous collective that has in actuality already established a foothold on the planet having first originated there. In a plot vaguely similar to sci-fi literature such as L Ron Hubbard's *Battlefield Earth*, the primitive (or in this case, not so primitive) humans must reclaim their planet back from a technologically advanced alien menace.

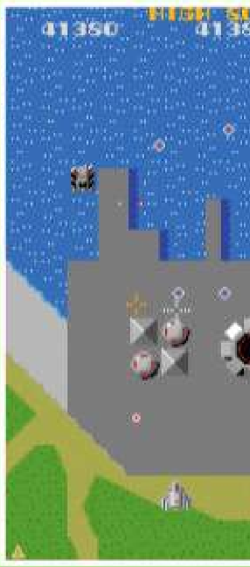
In its standard upright cabinet, *Xevious* doesn't look like much. The familiar cartoon-style image of the player's craft dodging various enemies from the game with the green vista of Earth below, adorns the sides. A lone crimson joystick sits in the middle of the control panel with buttons for fire and bomb and one or two players. This panel sits beneath the main screen rather than part of it, while a horizontal block of miscellaneous target and other instrument images are used to drag the player mentally into the cockpit of their spacecraft, the Solvalou.

> "I had an arcade machine delivered to my house and spent the next few months playing nothing but Xevious"
> CHRIS HINSLEY

BRAG
ZAKATO

That sleek jet-like machine, together with its Russian-styled name is the star of *Xevious*. Allegedly inspired by the Nostromo from the 1979 sci-fi horror film *Alien*, the craft has a jet propulsion powering its small form crisply across the screen. A short brace of fixed wings house the front-facing dual aerial cannons (or Air Zapper) while the nose of the Solvalou contains its 'Blaster' bombs, dropping down on the virtual target that constantly hovers in front of the craft. These powerful armaments are apt; as an entrenched enemy, the Xevious, are extremely well-fortified, boosted by considerable air support. Small circular cannons fire at the Solvalou as enemy spaceships, beginning with relatively harmless flying saucers before moving to the nimbler fighters, assault the lone human saviour. Large blocks, reminiscent of the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, tumble down the screen, impervious to both of the Solvalou's attacks. Small black orbs appear from nowhere, homing in on the fragile craft that, in the tradition of early shoot-'em-ups, has no health bar – one hit and it's a valuable Solvalou gone. And then there's the boss. ▶

» [Arcade] The lush green forests and brown roads occasionally give way to alternate areas.



ANDOR GENESIS MOTHERSHIP

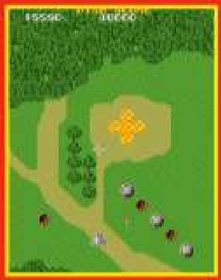
MASTERING XEVIOUS

HOW TO RECLAIM THE EARTH FOR MANKIND

CAPTURE THE FLAG

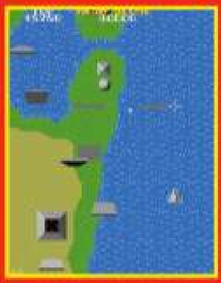
Throughout the landscape of *Xevious* there are four secret flags, ripped from the narrow lanes of another Namco hit, *Rally-X*. The secret locations of these flags can only be divulged by a random bomb, although they always appears in the same place. With an extra life the reward for picking them up, they're worth tracking down.

ECONOMIC BOMBING



There's never as much time as you'd like in *Xevious* to pick targets and bomb them. So if you spot a cluster of ground cannons, try and aim for between the two of them. A successful hit will eliminate both targets giving you a precious second or two to plan your next attack.

WATCH FOR THE BACURA

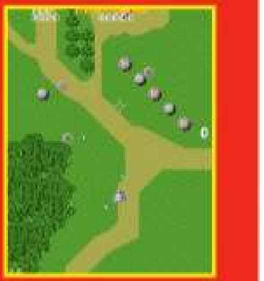


Like many of the enemies in *Xevious*, these indestructible spinning blocks are more hazardous as the game progresses. The Bacura formations become thicker and more troublesome, especially when combined with enemy ground forces such as in the screenshot here. It's often better to focus on simply surviving in such situations rather than trying to destroy the enemy.

BOMB ON THE RUN

Mastering how to bomb moving targets is the trickiest aspect of *Xevious*, especially given the air support that these targets often command. The key is to anticipate their movement and place the bomb at a suitable location ahead of them – easier said than done. Noting enemy movement patterns will help enormously.

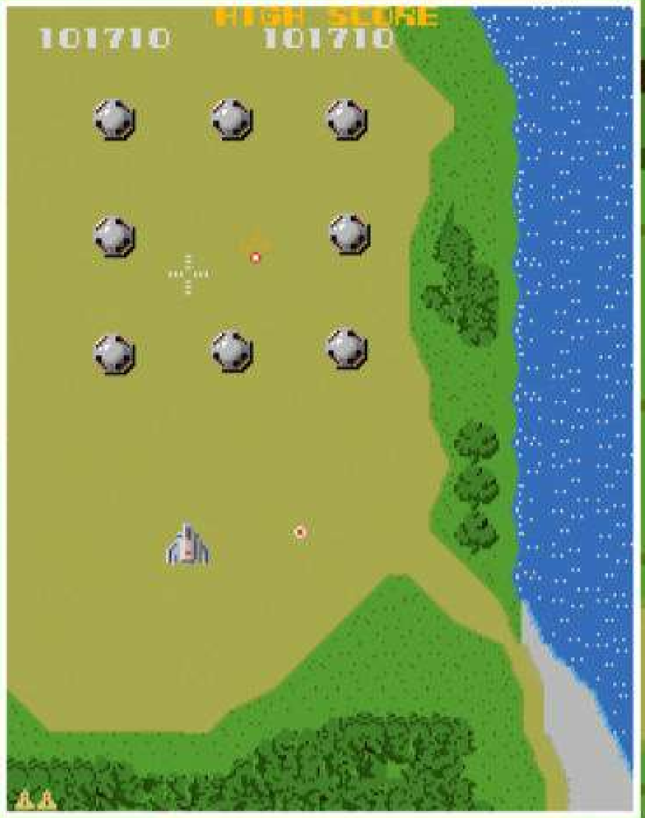
TRICKY TOROIDS



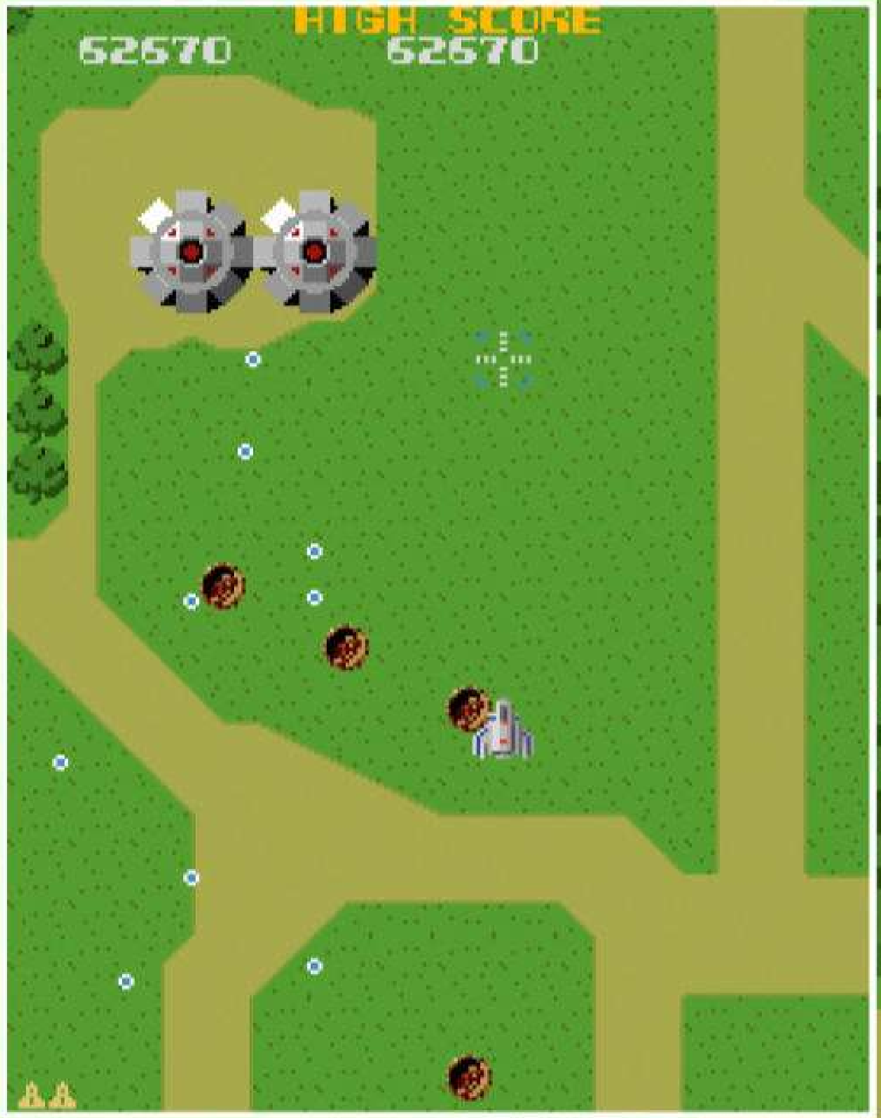
While initially harmless, continual successful destruction of the Toroid fighters will soon result in a more aggressive form that – shock – fires back at the player. Often breezing on to the screen in packs of four or more, these twirling saucers sharply veer off the screen as soon as the Solvalou lines them up, making them tricky customers.

TAKING OUT THE ANDOR GENESIS

Firing bullets and Zakatos at the player, the Andor Genesis is a formidable enemy. There are two methods of defeating it: the four glowing gun ports can be destroyed or you can go for gold and try and bomb the mothership's core. Defeated, the core escapes, ready for use in the next Andor Genesis.



» [Arcade] While generally less of a threat, later formations of ground enemies require care to avoid or destroy.

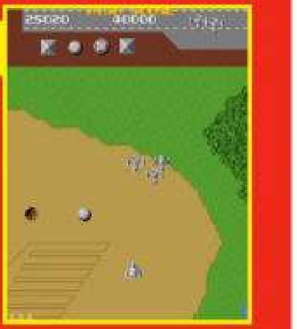


» [Arcade] A brace of Garu Derota, the deadliest of the ground forces.

NOTABLE SEQUELS

FURTHER TALES OF XEVIOUS AND ITS WAR WITH MANKIND

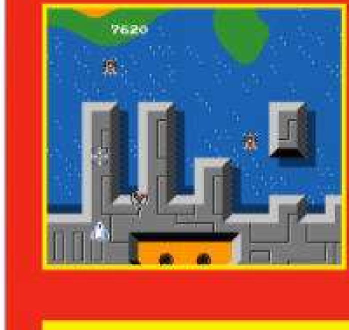
SUPER XEVIOUS



ARCADE ■ 1984

Released a year after the runaway success of *Xevious*, *Super Xevious* may appear similar to fans which is because… it is. Offering the same South American jungle backgrounds and gameplay, the main difference is more aggressive enemies and *Galaxian*-style sub-bosses. Otherwise it's a brutal exercise in making a difficult challenge even harder.

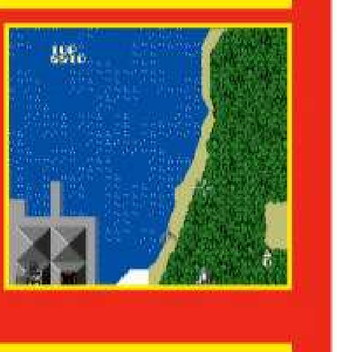
SUPER XEVIOUS: GAMP NO NAZO



NES ■ 1986

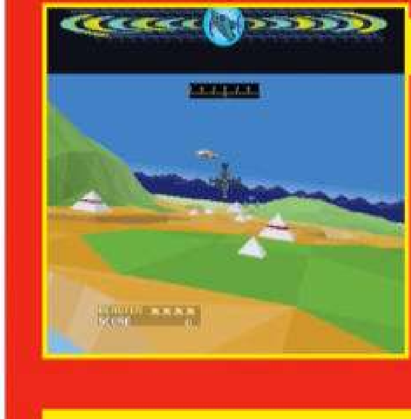
This Famicom game from 1986 expands deeply upon the original premise of *Xevious*, noting the General Artificial Matrix Producer (GAMP) as the chief enemy. The addition of puzzles is odd however, and detracts from what is otherwise a noble effort to enhance the story of *Xevious*. The steep difficulty and retention of that annoying repetitive sound doesn't help either.

XEVIOUS FARDRAUT DENSETSU



PC ENGINE ■ 1990

Expanding on the MSX2 game, *Xevious Fardraut Saga*, this PC Engine update has better graphics and the same two modes, clarifying them to arcade (the original arcade version of *Xevious*) and *Fardraut*, the new version with more power-ups and actual proper music – a blessed relief. Smart and fun, this is an excellent game.



SOLVALOU

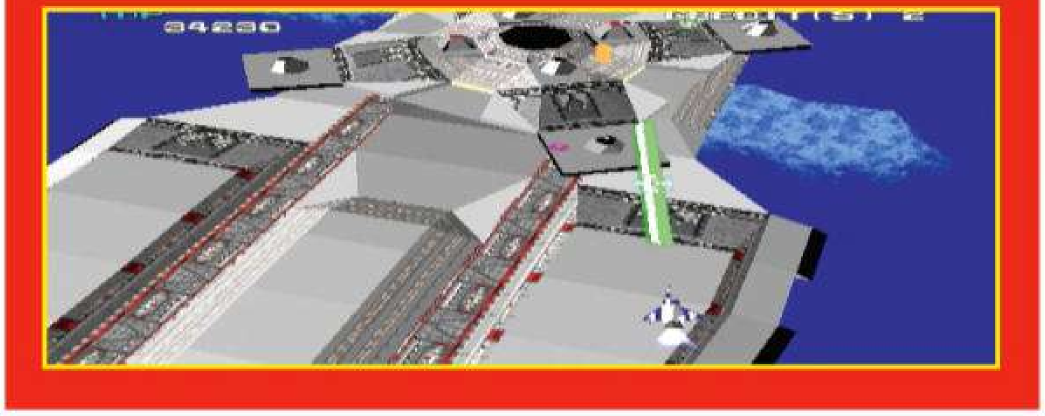
ARCADE ■ 1991

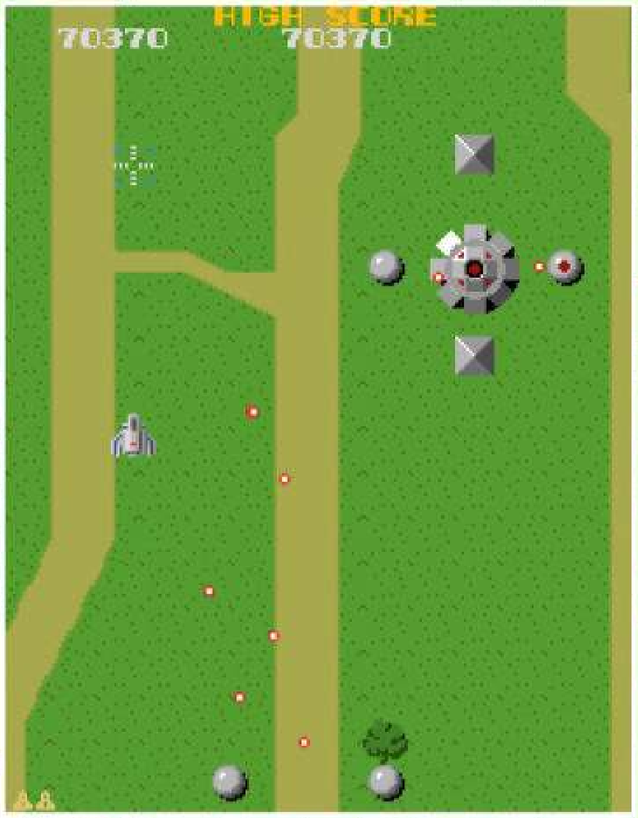
Looking mightily similar to on-rails sibling *Starblade*, *Solvalou* takes the name of the famous fighter from *Xevious* and transposes it into a shiny new polygonal 3D world. Seeing the world of *Xevious* thrust into a new dimension is initially thrilling but in truth *Solvalou* is a little too clunky and slow to be much fun.

XEVIOUS 3D/G

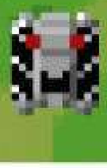
ARCADE AND PLAYSTATION ■ 1996

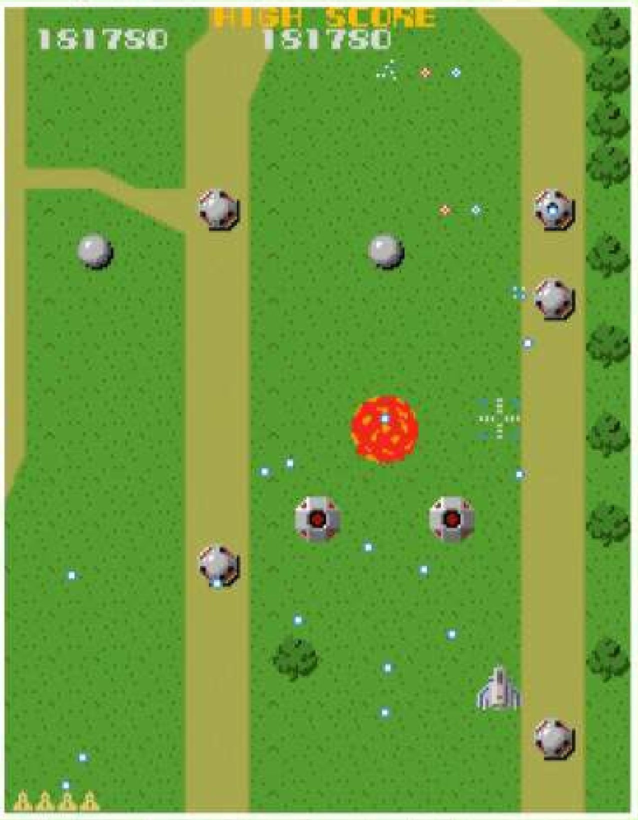
Xevious returned to its 2D roots with this arcade game, ported to the PlayStation a year later. While it may lack the charm of its famous forbear, the addition of multiple power-ups – the flexing and twisty lightning in particular – adds a considerable extra dimension, and there's a fantastic soundtrack too.



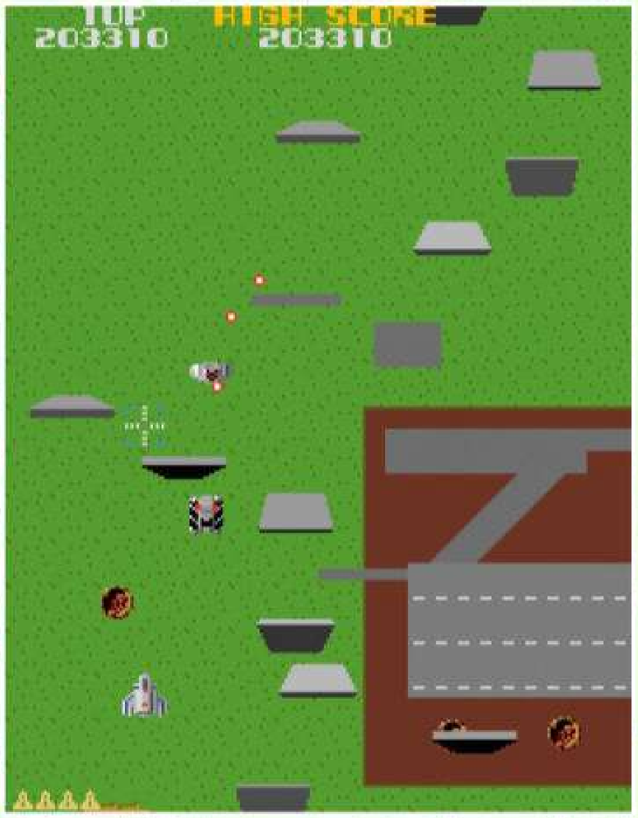


» [Arcade] Enemy fire spits from above and below.

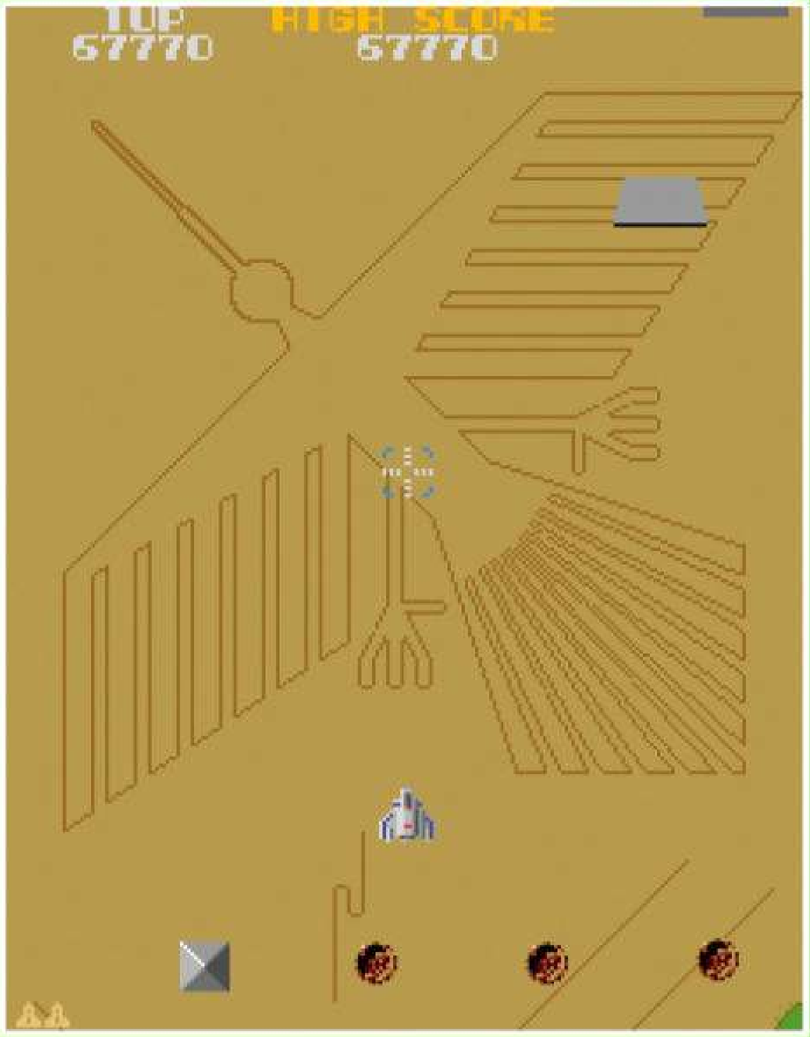




» [Arcade] It isn't long before *Xevious* starts to become devious.



» [Arcade] Harmless in isolation, the later clusters of invincible Bacura can be troublesome.

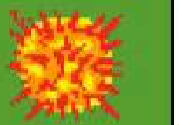


» [Arcade] A distinct angular bird, inspired by the Peruvian Nazca Lines.

"I think if you look at the ST version and the arcade game side-by-side, the maps are almost identical"

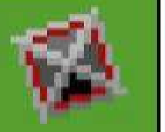
CHRIS HINSLEY

EXPLOSION



It may be hard to believe, but boss battles in shoot-'em-ups were rare in 1982. Released in 1980, Taito's Phoenix contains a boss mothership that encompasses a whole level of the fixed shoot-'em-up. *Xevious* went further, incorporating a regular attack of the Andor Genesis mothership into its levels, the huge imposing craft appearing at regular intervals to spit bullets at the player. There's a then-unique tactical aspect to taking down this beast: destroying the glowing gun emplacements reduces the amount of fire spouted in your direction, but takes time. Quicker, and more dangerous, is bombing the central core, which immediately grounds the Andar Genesis and sees the core zipping off to power the next hulking spacecraft.

SHEONITE

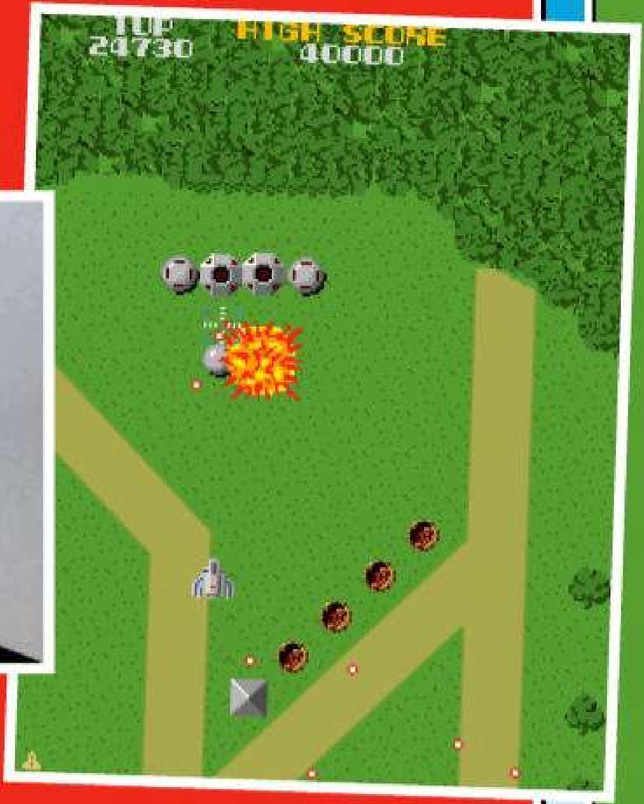


While its gameplay might seem generic and repetitious today, *Xevious* includes several fascinating elements that perhaps explain its status as a highly influential and revered arcade game. The landscape scrolls constantly over its 16 stages yet there is no indication of whether the player has advanced or which stage they are currently in. Fortunately, losing a life after 70% or more progress in a particular segment propels you on to the next stage and this odd lack of feedback gives the game a relentless nature, not helped by the enemies that spawn into a more threatening version when the player successfully eradicates a number of them. Interestingly, they can then be reverted to their original type by destroying the Zolback radar installations that frequent the forests and roads of Earth. That backdrop design, sweeping forests, seas,

JARA

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER CHATS TO VETERAN CHRIS HINSLEY ON HIS ROLE IN THE ATARI ST VERSION OF XEVIOUS



Had you worked on an arcade conversion before *Xevious*?

No, it was actually my first arcade conversion – in fact, Probe's first two arcade conversions along with *Metro-Cross*. On the strength of these, Probe went on to get many more contracts with the US arcade game vendors so I think Fergus McGovern [Probe owner] was probably very pleased. At the time, he had just started Probe and myself and Tim Moore [*Metro-Cross* coder] went to see him at their office, a small room above a shop. This was when it was a two-man company!

Were you familiar with *Xevious*?

Not prior to getting the contract. But I had an arcade machine delivered to my house and spent the next few months playing nothing but *Xevious*. There was no real documentation, level maps or graphics so I had to learn all of the maps by playing the game and copying the graphics by eye into the Advanced Art Studio, a graphic editing package I had written for the Atari ST.

Didn't you think it odd, converting a relatively old arcade game?

Not really, I could understand why Fergus wanted to take on the contracts because it would lead to him getting future contracts if he could do a good job. I think myself and Tim Moore acquitted ourselves admirably and certainly Probe went on to big things afterwards.

Were there any parts of the game you were disappointed with?

Due to the aspect ratio – the cabinet was a vertically-mounted monitor – it meant that I couldn't really use the entire screen on the ST and keep things looking the same. So I chose to have a rather large panel on the right side of the screen which contained the score, number of lives and so on. I was never very happy with that approach but at least it made all the graphics on the main game look identical to the arcade game.

Were you under a lot of pressure?

The usual time pressure – can I have it yesterday? Actually, it wasn't that bad, but it was a bit of a rush job. I think it only took a couple of months from start to finish.

Did you consider mouse control?

I experimented with it, but there was no easy way to make it playable.

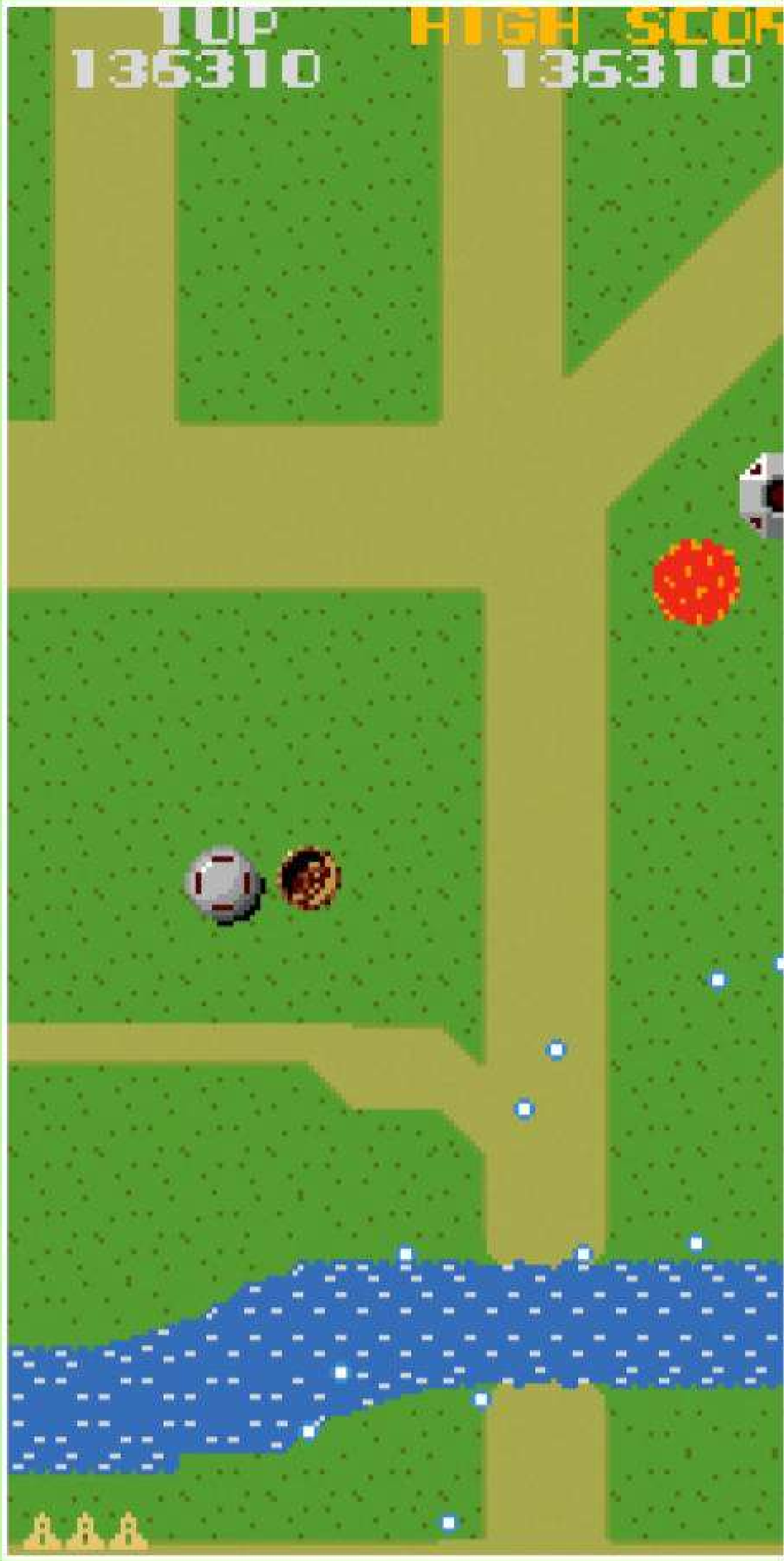
Finally, were you happy with how the conversion turned out?

Yes, very much so. I think if you look at the ST version and the arcade game side-by-side, the maps are almost identical and the graphics are pretty much pixel accurate, along with the SFX and music.

rivers and beautiful drawings, redolent of southern Peru's Nazca Lines, ground *Xevious* to a familiar setting, giving the player a real sense that they are defending their home planet against an alien invader. The game also includes a pair of strange bonuses, each hidden beneath the surface. A presumed fan of *Rally-X*, Masanobu Endo disguised four flags within *Xevious*' stages, each bestowing an extra life to the player when picked up and a 1,000 point bonus for revealing it in the first place. Furthermore, six sets of Sol Citadels can be uncovered and these cause the player's bombing crosshair to glow when nearby. Location and destruction of each citadel yields a handy 4,000 points. Finally, there's the dual fire of the Solvalou itself, a twinset of destruction that adapts to enemies both in the air and on the ground.

While *Xevious*' advanced spirit is a little spoiled with atavistic themes such as its unending gameplay, it had enough innovation to prove a fantastic hit in Japan, spawning a mini-industry of novelisations, model kits and other merchandise. Gamers, eager to learn more about its world, devoured the sequels and expansions that greatly developed the story behind Xevious and its Skynet-esque supercomputer, the GAMP. However, in other territories it was a different story. Picked up by Atari for distribution in the US and Europe, *Xevious* failed to inspire Western gamers in the same way, despite a massive promotional push that included some of the very first TV spots for an arcade videogame. Nevertheless, US Gold licensed *Xevious* for many of the home conversions in 1986 and leaned on new partner Probe Software to develop the majority of them. *Xevious* was a big hit for the publisher, paving the way for its successful run of arcade licences in the mid-to-late-Eighties. Perhaps it was the realism of the game that endeared home audiences in a way that arcade goers didn't appreciate. Gone are the bizarre suicidal tendencies of the opposition that plagues games such as *Galaxian* and *Galaga*. These intelligent aliens speed into view before pausing, letting off a couple of shots and then retreating safely back to the void of off-screen. All grey, sharp angles and glowing red lights, the enemies of *Xevious* give it its true life, and this is none more apparent than in the huge giant Andor Genesis mothership. This massive flying fortress of terror, a hovering pyramid that embodies the power of the Xevious, remains one of arcade's most recognisable villains thanks to its low growl and elusive core unit, forever shooting off to the next titan despite the player's best efforts to destroy it.

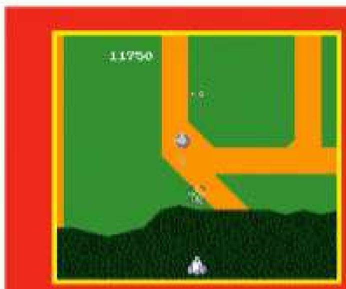
Xevious is one of the toughest arcade shoot-'em-ups, which makes the release of *Super Xevious*, an enhanced and considerably stiffer challenge, something of a holy grail for high score hunters. Countless more sequels and spin-offs have appeared, yet it is with the original game, setting the trend with its pioneering elements such as adaptive enemies, hidden bonuses and boss battles, that they all owe a debt to. ✱



» [Arcade] Rivers and roads frequent the ground beneath Solvalou.

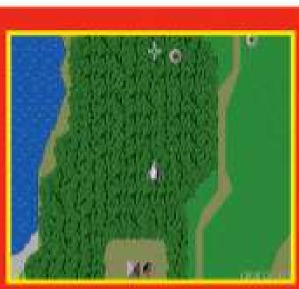
XEVIOUS CONVERSIONS

RETRO GAMER DISCOVERS THE BEST AND WORST OF XEVIOUS HOME INVASIONS



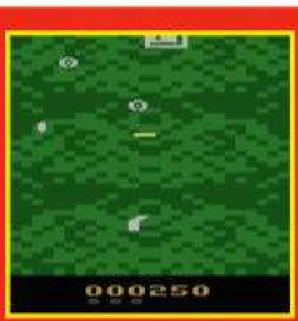
NES

The Solvalou nimbly darts across the screen in the NES/Famicom version of *Xevious*, and the console adeptly replicates much of the arcade game despite a lack of graphical finesse in certain areas. The same game was released on the Game Boy Advance as part of the NES Classics series.



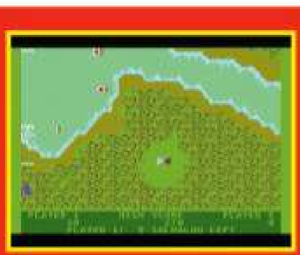
SHARP X68000

The Sharp computer version of *Xevious* is chiefly notable for presenting the game in its correct aspect ratio, without the need for an inanimate sidebar. Developed by Dempa, the arcade game is also smoothly reproduced here with some of the enemies even displaying greater detail.



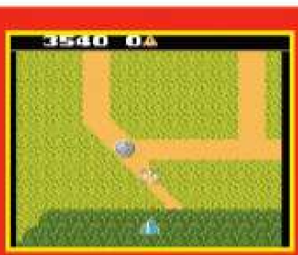
ATARI 2600

Unreleased originally in any territory, the Atari 2600 version of *Xevious* bears little resemblance to its arcade inspiration save for the green background, inevitably reduced to a mass of blocks. It remains acceptably playable, however, especially in its recently cleaned-up form.



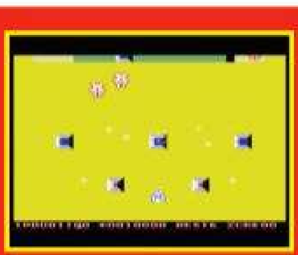
ATARI 5200

As with the Atari 2600 game, this was unreleased back in the Eighties but has been rediscovered in recent times as a prototype. It looks good, but moves a little too slowly to be a contender. The strange horizontal zapper of the Atari 2600 is in evidence again and the maps seem to bear only a slight likeness to the arcade game.



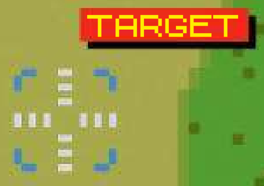
ATARI 7800

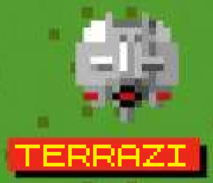
This Atari port actually made it to market and it's an immense improvement over the unreleased Atari 2600 and 5200 games. While the zoomed-in view makes avoiding enemy fire frustrating in places, the general pace and vibe of the game is spot-on, as is the sound with the snappish effects offsetting the persistently annoying 'tune'.

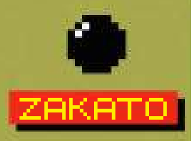


MSX

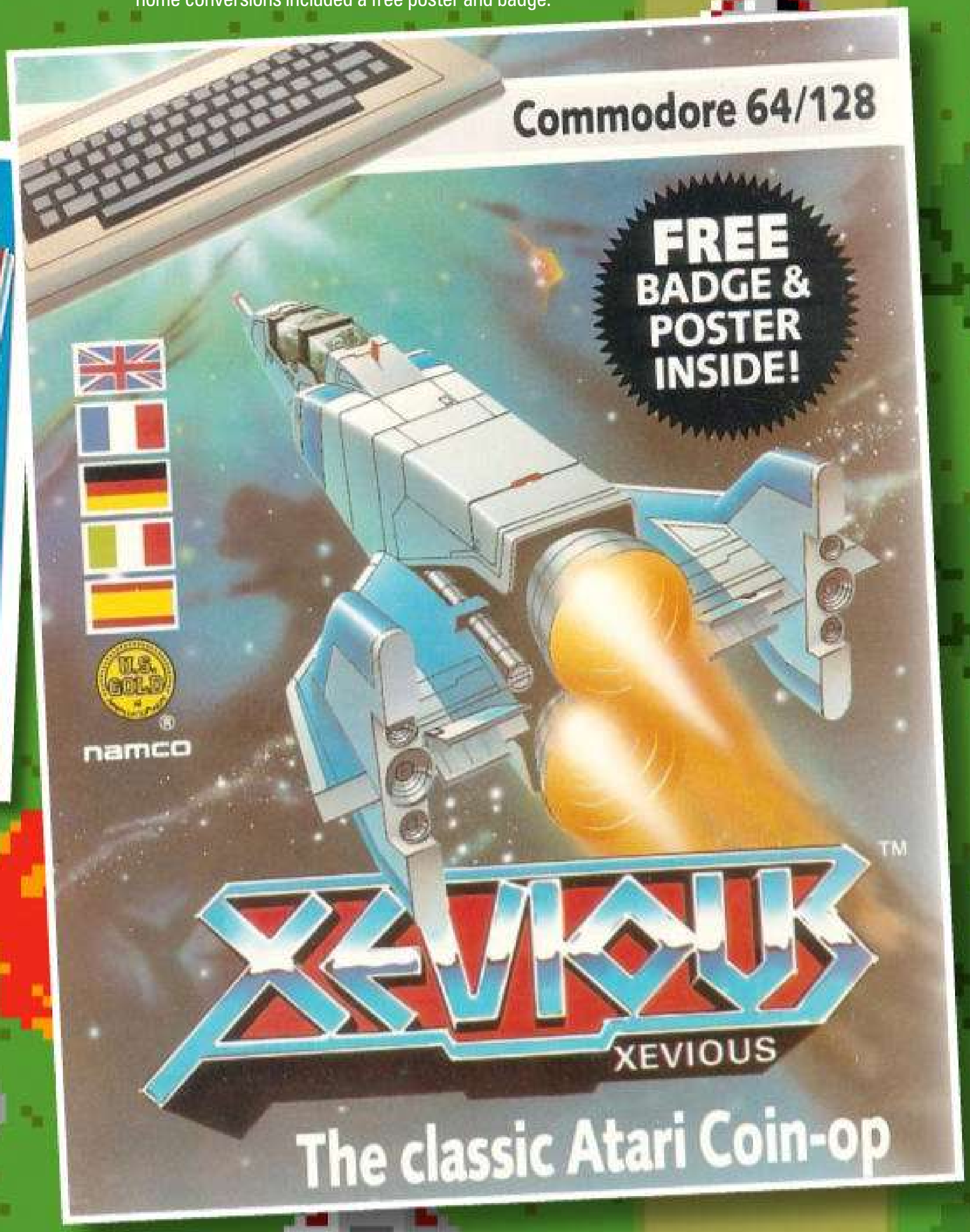
Modestly titled *The Micro Xevious*, this unofficial port from Zemina appeared on the MSX in 1990, two years after the line's official upgrade, *Xevious Fardraut Saga*. This version is spoiled by trademark MSX choppy scrolling, although the option to substitute that maddening tune is a welcome bonus.



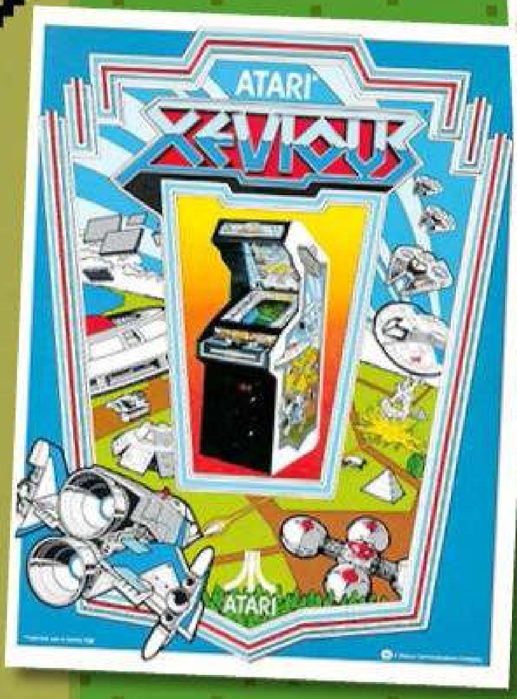


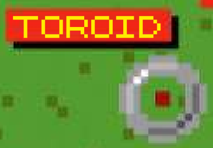


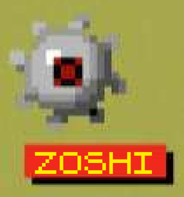
» With a keen eye on added value, some of the US Gold home conversions included a free poster and badge.

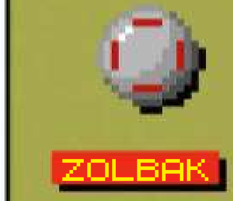


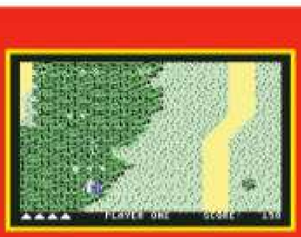
» Atari's Stateside promotional campaign was formidable.





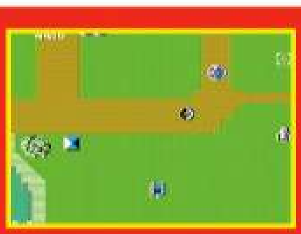






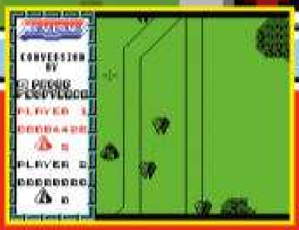
C64

On a computer seemingly made for scrolling shmups, Commodore 64 *Xevious* is a woeful misfire. With so many superior peers available, the critics savaged its lack of variation and poor graphics. Slow, monotonous and tedious to play, this is comfortably the poorest of Probe and US Gold's efforts. A real disappointment.



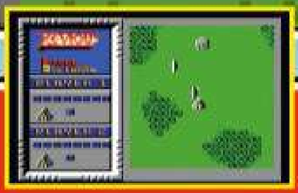
APPLE II

While its gameplay is a touch on the sluggish side, the Apple II computer achieves a perfectly serviceable port of *Xevious*. The ground detail is admittedly on the sparse side and there's only a little variation in enemies, but overall it's about as good as you could expect on the ageing American computer.



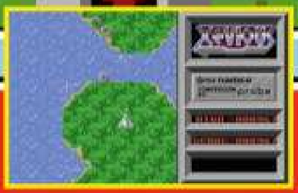
ZX SPECTRUM

Lacking colour and any semblance of in-game sound, the ZX Spectrum version does at least front up well with a striking loading screen courtesy of Nick Bruty. Unfortunately, even by Spectrum standards, the style of *Xevious*' gameplay had been supplanted by 1986 relegating the conversion to also-ran status, despite being a suitable take on the Namco classic.



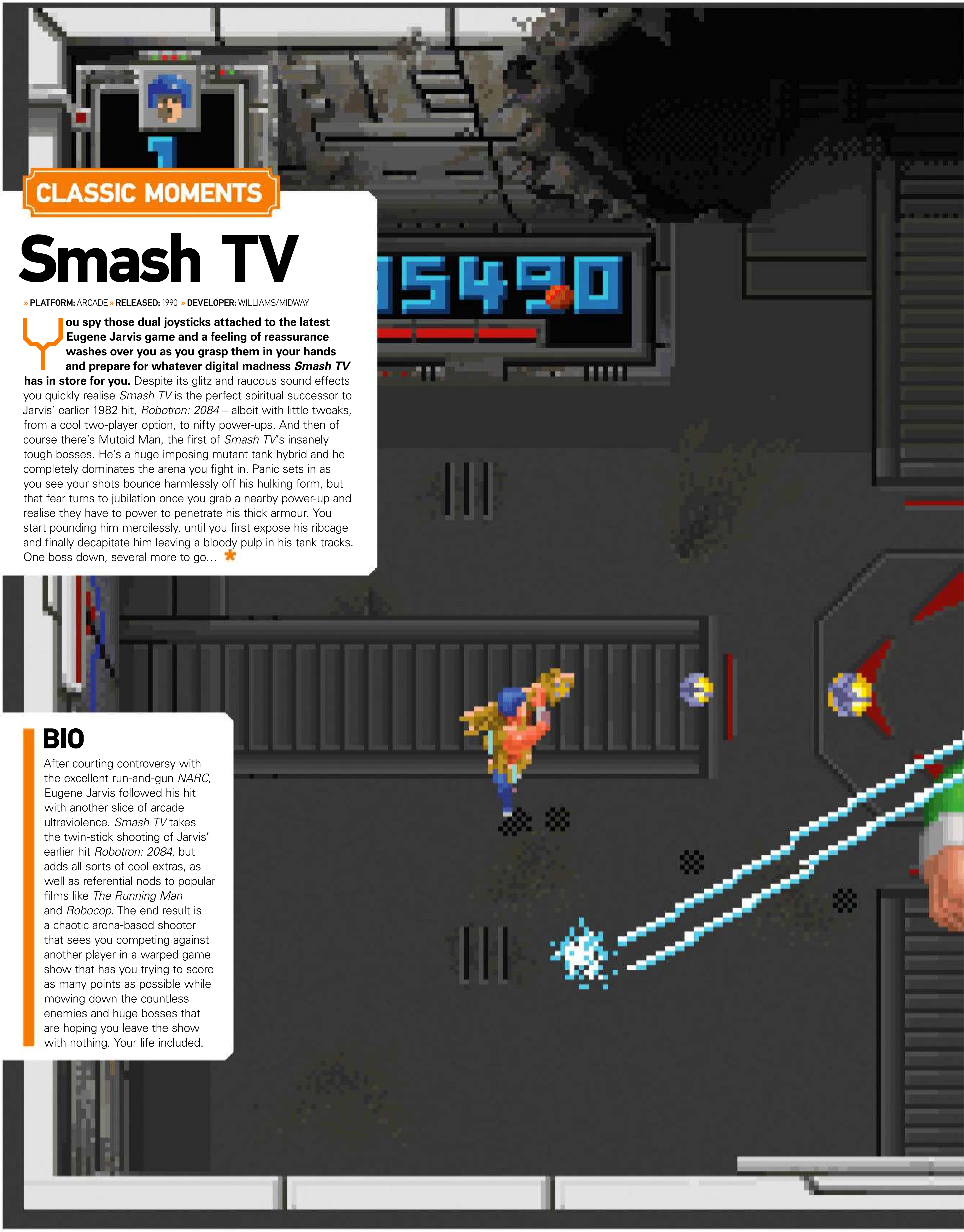
AMSTRAD CPC

Another Probe conversion, and for once an original Amstrad game rather than a debasing ZX Spectrum port. It shows too: this is an impressive version of the grand forerunner of shoot-'em-ups and demonstrates what could be achieved on the computer when a dedicated effort is made. The biggest drawback is the absence of the Andor Genesis, but otherwise this is a fine game.



ATARI ST

Looking possibly even cleaner and sharper than the arcade original, the vertical aspect of *Xevious* is achieved as with most ports with the use of a sidebar, this time to the right of the play area. It's faster, too, although this regrettably means that some segments are horrendously frustrating to negotiate. Still, the hours put into research by coder Chris Hinsley are obvious thanks to the accurate maps and enemy patterns.



CLASSIC MOMENTS

Smash TV

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **RELEASED:** 1990 » **DEVELOPER:** WILLIAMS/MIDWAY

You spy those dual joysticks attached to the latest Eugene Jarvis game and a feeling of reassurance washes over you as you grasp them in your hands and prepare for whatever digital madness *Smash TV* has in store for you. Despite its glitz and raucous sound effects you quickly realise *Smash TV* is the perfect spiritual successor to Jarvis' earlier 1982 hit, *Robotron: 2084* – albeit with little tweaks, from a cool two-player option, to nifty power-ups. And then of course there's Mutoid Man, the first of *Smash TV*'s insanely tough bosses. He's a huge imposing mutant tank hybrid and he completely dominates the arena you fight in. Panic sets in as you see your shots bounce harmlessly off his hulking form, but that fear turns to jubilation once you grab a nearby power-up and realise they have to power to penetrate his thick armour. You start pounding him mercilessly, until you first expose his ribcage and finally decapitate him leaving a bloody pulp in his tank tracks. One boss down, several more to go… *

BIO

After courting controversy with the excellent run-and-gun *NARC*, Eugene Jarvis followed his hit with another slice of arcade ultraviolence. *Smash TV* takes the twin-stick shooting of Jarvis' earlier hit *Robotron: 2084*, but adds all sorts of cool extras, as well as referential nods to popular films like *The Running Man* and *Robocop*. The end result is a chaotic arena-based shooter that sees you competing against another player in a warped game show that has you trying to score as many points as possible while mowing down the countless enemies and huge bosses that are hoping you leave the show with nothing. Your life included.

PRESS STA
TO PLA

MORE CLASSIC SMASH TV MOMENTS

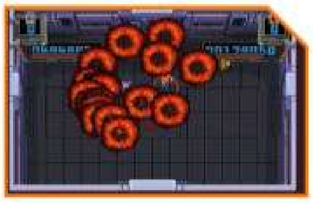
Heads up!

There are numerous ways to die in *Smash TV*, but stepping on a mine results in the messiest death. While they don't exactly litter the screen, they often get covered by presents or swarming enemies, so they become easy to lose track of. Contact not only causes you to lose a life, but it also results in your body being hurled into the air and separated into bloody gooey chunks. Yuck.

Prizes galore

Although *Smash TV* is an excellent twin-stick shooter it also doubles as a satirical commentary on the excesses of consumerism. It's captured perfectly in the gaudy bonus areas you occasionally visit and load up on prizes, which are presented by a lecherous host who promises you "big money" as he leers at the girls he has his arms draped over.

You go boom now



Smash TV has some destructive power-ups from powerful rockets to a devastating three-way shot. Our favourite though is the bomb you can grab. This powerful weapon of destruction obliterates virtually everything on-screen causing them to explode into little balls of flame. It's almost as satisfying as the triumphant shout of "Bingo!" that's immediately heard afterwards.

Feeling crispy

Smash TV's second stage introduces a number of robotic creations that have no problem hunting you down. Some of the worst encounters are with these floating drones as they're not only extremely mobile, but will attack you with lengthy lasers that will immediately electrify you if they make contact. Your best bet is to keep moving and hope that you don't get fried.

MAM

W

AS GAMING TECHNOLOGY GOES, IT DOESN'T GET MUCH SIMPLER THAN NINTENDO'S GAME & WATCH LCD HANDHELDS. BUT EMULATING THEM ACCURATELY, AND PRESERVING THEM DIGITALLY, IS SUCH A CHALLENGE THAT NINTENDO ITSELF HASN'T EVEN ENTERTAINED THE IDEA. WE MEET THE MAME BENEFACTORS WHO'VE DEVOTED THEIR TIME AND TALENT TO DOING WHAT NINTENDON'T **WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL**

You'll be aware that you can play the arcade version of *Donkey Kong* on the MAME emulator. You probably also know that you can play the multitude of console and computer ports too, since MAME merged with its sister emulator, MESS, back in 2015. Yes, you can even play the Intellivision version, if you so wanted.

But did you know that you can also play the *Donkey Kong* Game & Watch handheld game on MAME? In fact, you can play all 60 official G&W games in MAME right now, from the first release, *Ball*, to the final one, *Mario The Juggler*. And it's as close as you'll get to playing the real thing. There's artwork available that provides the background layers that many of the games require, and even displays the body of the unit (with animated buttons to boot). Look around – all of the screens used in this feature have been grabbed directly from MAME. For anyone who played a G&W game as a kid – perhaps one of the more common ones that were sold in catalogues and toy stores back then – it's amazing to be able to now experience the whole eclectic range.

Given its history, it's hardly surprising that MAME is still seen as just an arcade emulator in many people's eyes. But with the addition of G&W and other electronic games, this is something that veteran MAME developer David Haywood hopes will start to change. "The progress made in areas like this will hopefully help challenge the perception people have over what MAME is and what it can do," he says. "MAME is often seen in the media as some project from two decades ago, where you can take an 18-year-old version, throw it on some cheap single-board computer, and play some arcade games. This viewpoint is a poor reflection of what MAME really is and doesn't do justice to the hard work that has been done in other areas. G&W emulation really shows that MAME is capable of so much more with the right dedication."

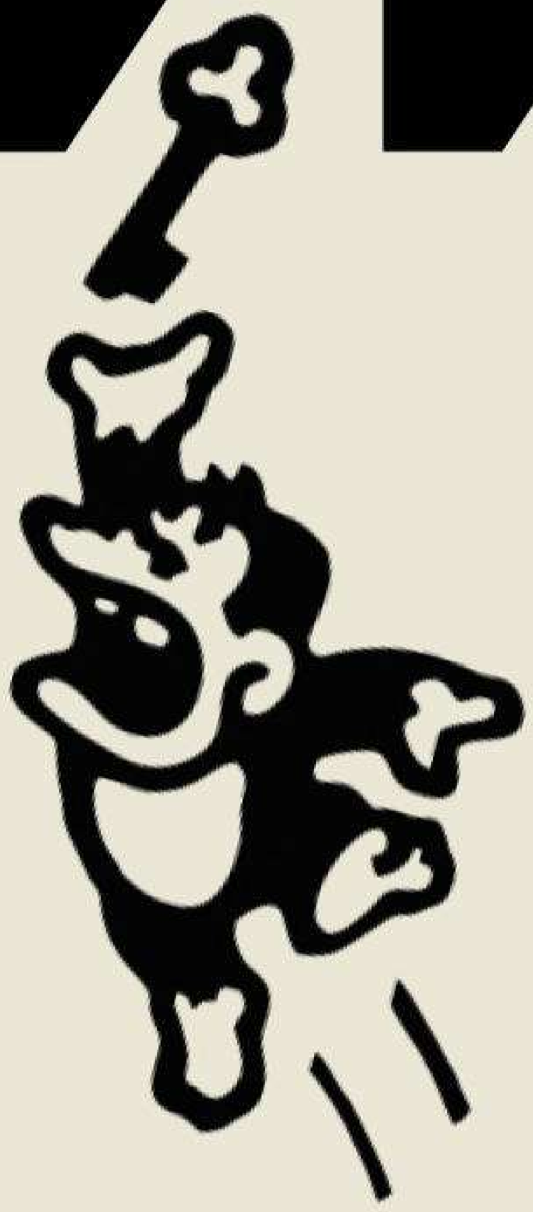
For G&W, that dedication was an international effort from a team of folk, stretching back several years. As with any community project, multiple people have been involved at different times in various work streams, so it can be difficult to pin down the exact chain of events. But a good place to start is in 2013, when MAME contributor Sean Riddle chanced upon some interesting patents. Sean, a computer programmer from Oklahoma, has been hacking hardware since the Nineties and has always had an interest in 'oddball' processors.

"While searching Google Patents for some obscure chip," he tells us, "I found the patents for the Konami LCD games *Top Gun*, *Gradius* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Along with the schematics of the games were drawings of the LCD panels and the full contents of the ROMs! I bought the games off eBay and opened them up, but instead of normal chips, they had 'globs' of epoxy. The die of the chip was glued to the printed circuit board, with tiny wires connecting it to traces on the board, then it had been covered in epoxy to protect it. So I couldn't get to all the pins, including an interesting one labelled 'TEST'. I used a hot-air gun to soften the epoxy so I could remove it, but some stuck to the die. That's when I had to learn about acids."

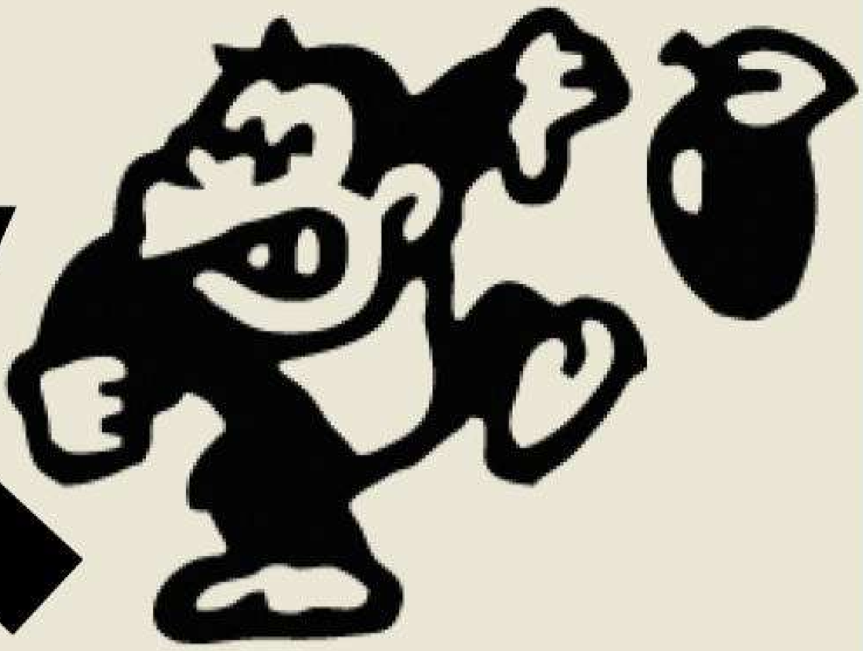
> "WHILE SEARCHING GOOGLE PATENTS FOR SOME OBSCURE CHIP I FOUND THE PATENTS FOR THE KONAMI LCD GAMES"
> **SEAN RIDDLE**

Sean is describing the process of decapsulating, or 'decapping', a chip. This involves removing the material that protects the die of the chip, allowing the die to be seen. Once it is decapped the ROM data can be visually read from the chip. As for the chip itself, the patents revealed that the handhelds used a 4-bit Sharp MCU (Microcontroller Unit) from the SM5xx family. Around the same time, another MAME contributor 'digshadow' discovered that G&W used the same MCU.

Sean continues, "I eventually mapped the bits on the dies to the bits in the ROM data from the patents. This let me dump other games visually. The G&W games use a normal chip instead of



AE & ATCH



SEAN RIDDLE

American Sean was instrumental in getting the project started, thanks to his decapping and dumping work. His top G&W title is *Mario The Juggler* "since I also juggle".

HENRIK ALGESTAM

Henrik from Sweden took up the mantle from Sean and dumped the bulk of G&W games. He also cracked the 'melody ROM'. His G&W title of choice is *Climber.*

RYAN HOLTZ

American Ryan helped to acquire the majority of G&W units, personally and through crowd funding. *Squish* is his go-to G&W game, "for the sheer playfield complexity".

LEE ROBSON

Englishman Lee designed and edited the supporting artwork for most of the games. His favourite G&W title is *Rain Shower* because, "It makes me feel close to home."

DAVID HAYWOOD

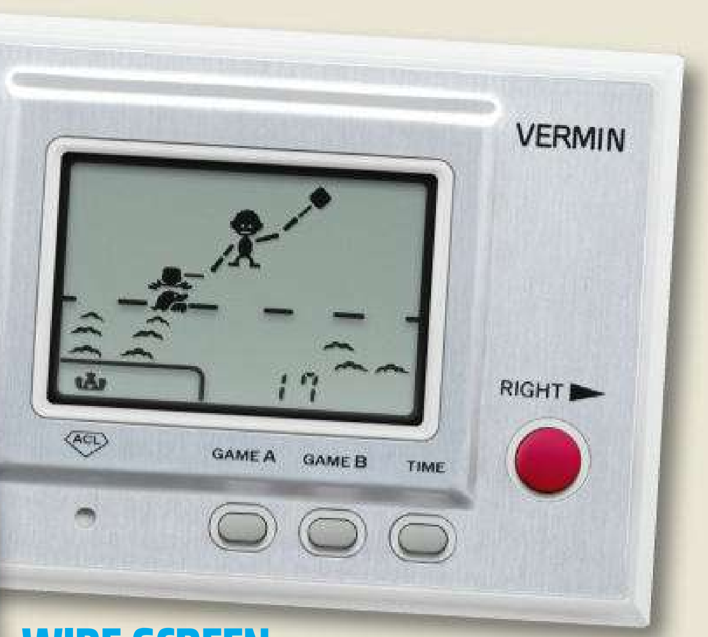
David's from the UK and he's an advocate of advances made in MAME. The game he keeps coming back to is *Oil Panic* "for its effective use of the dual screen set-up".

BY DESIGN

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE TYPE OF GAME & WATCH…

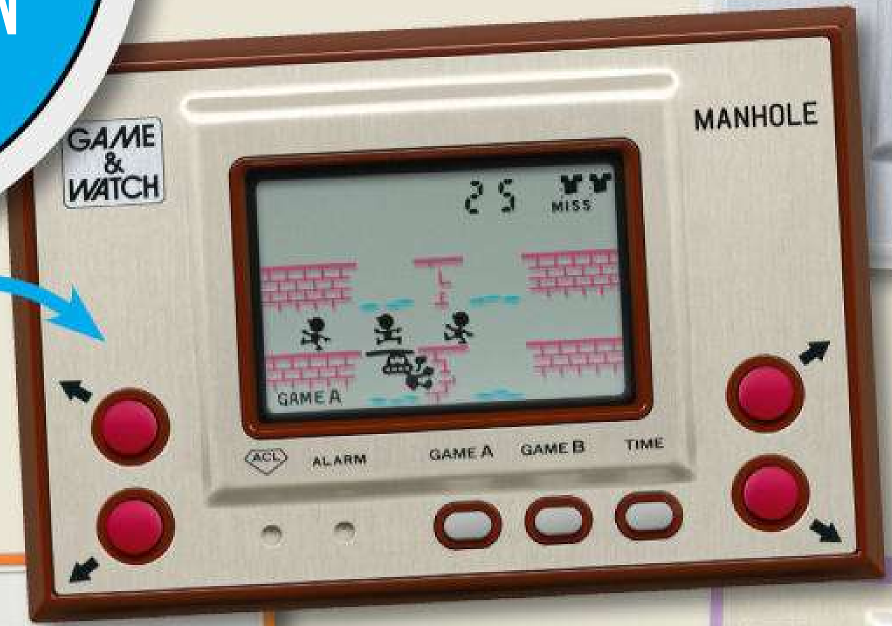
SILVER APRIL 1980

The original models featured a simple, silver-coloured surround that gave the series its name. There were five games in the range – *Ball*, *Flagman*, *Vermin*, *Fire* and *Judge* – and they were simple too, with *Vermin* and *Fire* being the standout pair.


GAME & WATCH
VERMIN
RIGHT
ACL
GAME A
GAME B
TIME

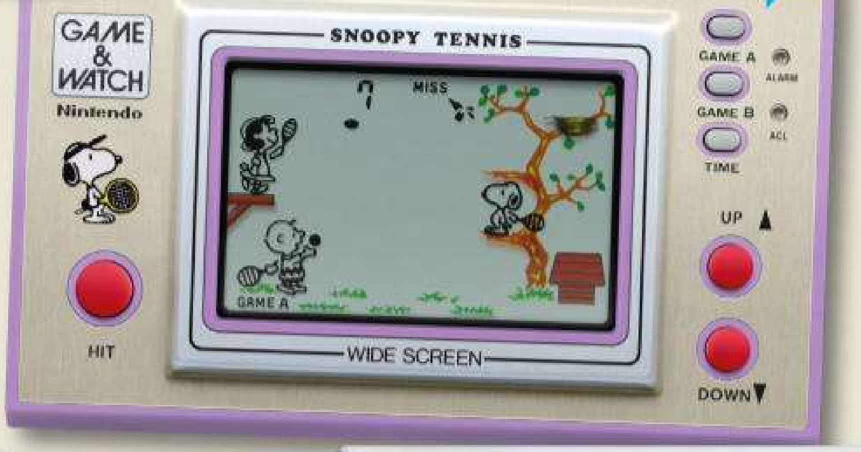
GOLD JANUARY 1981

The surround was now gold, and they came with a foldaway stand, but these were otherwise identical to the Silver models. The titles were *Manhole*, *Helmet* and *Lion*. *Helmet* was released in the UK as *Headache* and is highly prized these days.


GAME & WATCH
MANHOLE
MISS
GAME A
ACL
ALARM
GAME A
GAME B
TIME

WIDE SCREEN JUNE 1981

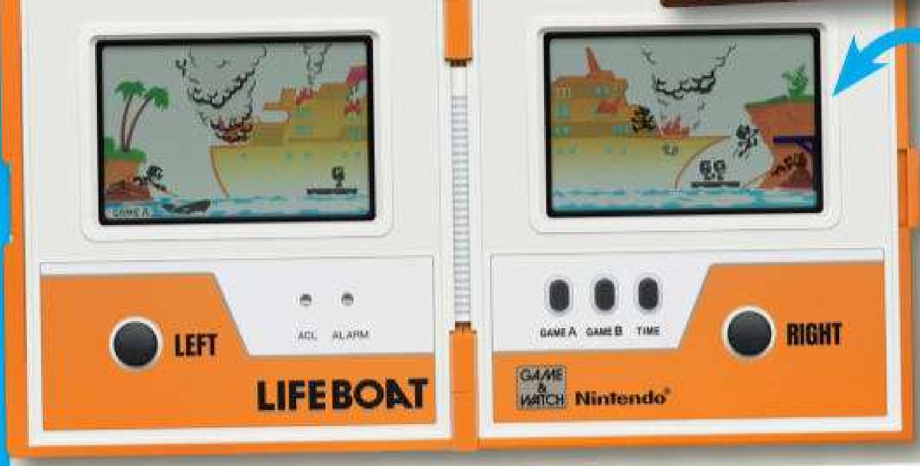
The format began to find its stride here, thanks to a larger screen and some strong titles, including three licences: *Popeye*, *Mickey Mouse* and *Snoopy Tennis*. Seven further titles made up the range, including *Parachute*, *Octopus* and a remastered *Fire*.


GAME & WATCH
Nintendo
SNOOPY TENNIS
MISS
GAME A
HIT
WIDE SCREEN
GAME A
ALARM
GAME B
ACL
TIME
UP
DOWN

MULTI SCREEN

MAY 1982

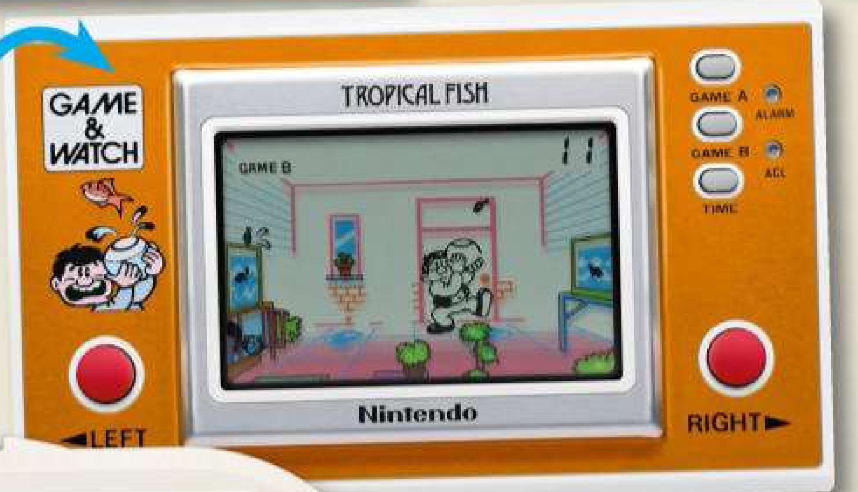
The introduction of dual screens proved to be a masterstroke, as did the debut of the famous Nintendo d-pad on *Donkey Kong*. The range was very popular, with 15 titles in total released, including several where the screens were side-by-side.


LEFT
ACL
ALARM
LIFEBOAT
GAME A
GAME B
TIME
RIGHT
GAME & WATCH
Nintendo

NEW WIDE SCREEN

OCTOBER 1982

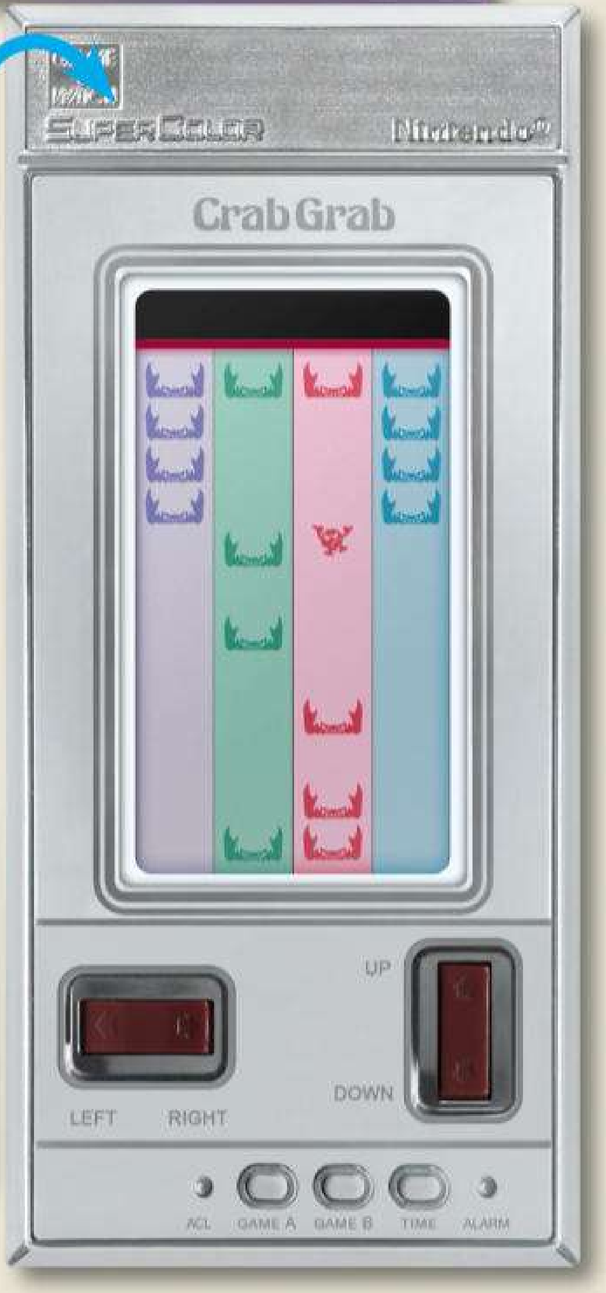
The 'New' was added thanks to the addition of colourful metallic surrounds to the standard Wide Screen design. Eight titles were released, including updates of old releases, some new ones, and 'standard' versions of games that were released in other ranges.


GAME & WATCH
TROPICAL FISH
GAME B
Nintendo
LEFT
RIGHT
GAME A
ALARM
GAME B
ACL
TIME

SUPER COLOR

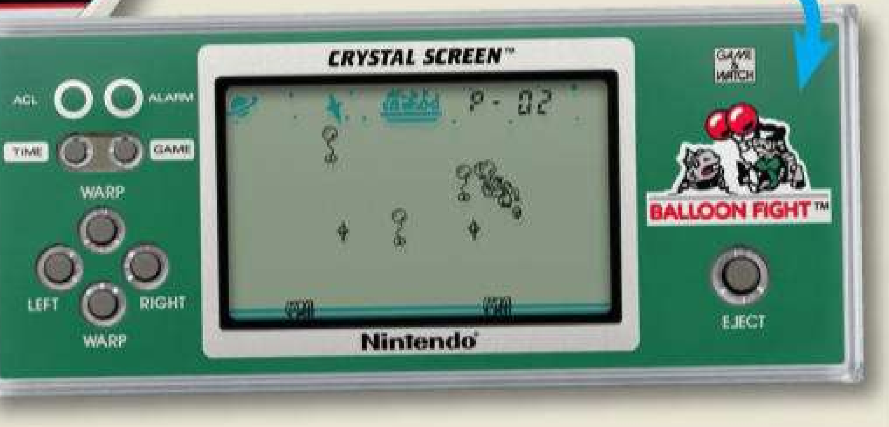
FEBRUARY 1984

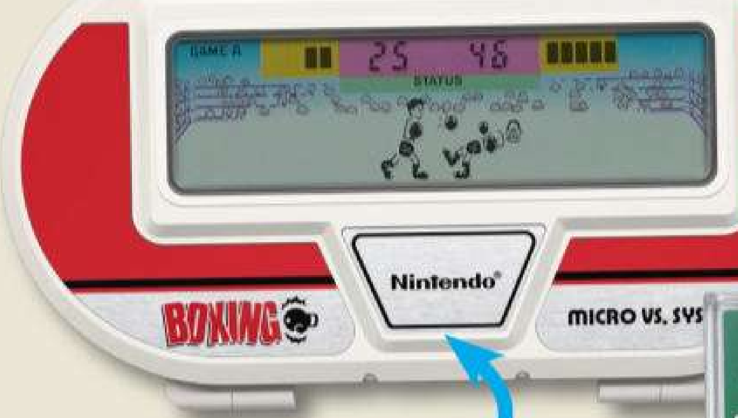
Despite the name, and the taller footprint, these were like a throwback to earlier designs, with the colour provided by a simple overlay. Only two titles were released – *Spitball Sparky* and *Crab Grab* – which suggests that the format didn't land well.


SUPER COLOR
Nintendo
Crab Grab
UP
DOWN
LEFT
RIGHT
ACL
GAME A
GAME B
TIME
ALARM

CRYSTAL SCREEN JUNE 1986

The last range to be introduced was a real showstopper. These elegant devices featured wide surrounds and transparent screens. The trio of games – *Super Mario Bros*, *Climber* and *Balloon Fight* – were later re-released in the New Wide Screen format.


CRYSTAL SCREEN
GAME & WATCH
ACL
ALARM
TIME
GAME
WARP
LEFT
RIGHT
BALLOON FIGHT
Nintendo
EJECT


GAME A
STATUS
Nintendo
BOXING
MICRO VS. SYS

MICRO VS SYSTEM JULY 1984

Another clever design decision saw the addition of two tiny joypads that slotted into the body of the handheld and allowed for versus play. The three titles were *Boxing* (known in the US as *Punch-Out!!*), *Donkey Kong 3* and *Donkey Kong Hockey*.

POPEYE
Nintendo
TABLE TOP
GAME A
GAME B
TIME
ACL
ALARM
PUNCH

TABLE TOP **APRIL 1983**

As the name implies, you couldn't slip these in your pocket. Designed to resemble mini coin-ops, the big selling point was the introduction of colour screens. Four titles came in this format: *Donkey Kong Jr*, *Mario's Cement Factory*, *Snoopy* and *Popeye*.

PANORAMA SCREEN
CONTROLLER
UP/DOWN
MARIO'S
Bombs Away
GAME A
GAME B
TIME
GAME & WATCH
Nintendo
ACL
ALARM

PANORAMA SCREEN **AUGUST 1983**

These retained the colour screens of the Table Top range, but they were more portable thanks to a foldout design. The titles were a mix of existing Table Top games and new ones, including *Mario's Bombs Away* and *Donkey Kong Circus*.

▶ an epoxied die, so I was able to experiment with the 'TEST' pin. When a signal was applied to it, ROM data was output on some pins! But it turned out that only one 'page' of ROM was output, and there were 44 pages on the chip. I posted the info on a forum and a fellow named Igor Rychenkov shared the process that he discovered to dump the ROM from the Russian clone of the chip, and it worked on these."

Having dumped the ROM contents, the next step was to digitise the LCD screens, in order to grab the 'graphics' for each game. The trick was to somehow photograph the screen with all of its segments showing. "I tried taking photographs of the LCD displays, but using a flash caused reflections and shadows that were difficult to clean up," continues Sean. "There's also the problem of identifying the contacts used to turn on each segment. I wound up cutting up the printed circuit board from one of the games. I cut a hole so that the LCD panel could be backlit and soldered 37 wires to it so I could control each segment independently. LCDs are fairly complex, and to avoid damaging them alternating current must be used, and different voltage levels are needed to avoid 'ghosting'. To get a picture with all of the segments enabled, all the common signals are connected and all the segment signals are connected, then a 3v AC signal is connected to each group of signals. The resulting picture has to be cleaned up to remove dust, scratches and visible crystals, then vectorised with a program like Potrace to create an SVG (Scalable Vector Graphics) file."

As Sean worked on dumping the games in his possession, real life intervened and he had to dial back his involvement. "I had done something like a dozen Konami games, five G&W games and about 100 Tiger Electronics games when my free time got squeezed. The G&W games were by far the most desired, but they were more difficult for a couple of reasons. The LCD panels on all 112 of the Konami and Tiger games were identical, which meant that the same printed circuit board could be used for all of them. In contrast, practically every G&W panel is different. That means a new printed circuit board has to be made for each game. In addition, most of the Konami and Tiger games are fairly common and inexpensive, so it wasn't impractical or unethical to destroy the games to decap the chips and read out the ROM data. The G&W games are less common and more expensive. At this point Henrik Algestam contacted me and wanted to help but didn't know anything about it. Luckily for me he's smart and driven and had the time. He improved on my techniques and dumped all of the remaining G&W games. I'm certain that people would still be waiting on the files if he hadn't taken that on."

> "THE HARDEST PART OF DUMPING AND EMULATING THESE UNITS WAS ACTUALLY GETTING HOLD OF THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE"
>
> **HENRIK ALGESTAM**

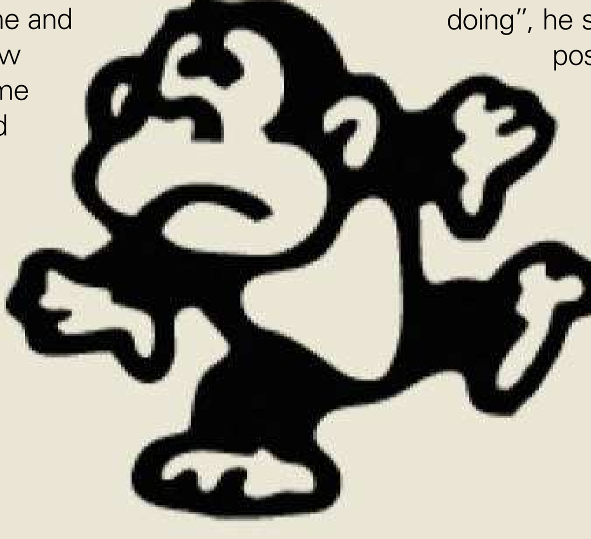
Henrik Algestam is a software development consultant from Sweden. He was able to take Sean's work and run with it. "I've always been fascinated by the G&W handhelds," he reveals, "but wasn't involved in preservation until I read about the first G&W games being emulated in MAME in 2017. Once I read up on how this was achieved and learnt about decapping, I contacted Sean and offered him some of my games for decapping. I had many questions about the process and eventually I was able to dump the games myself thanks to his help."

To simplify the process of photographing the LCD screens with all of the segments enabled, Henrik designed custom PCB breakout boards for the different screen variants. "The later colour G&W games are interesting as the LCD display is inversed so that active segments are translucent and a colour inlay provides the colour graphics. What makes these games a bit more difficult to dump is the way the display is assembled in a sandwich-style way with more layers than the standard G&W games."

One element that was easier to digitise were the static background layers that the majority of G&W titles feature. These often just add a visual flourish and splash of colour to monochrome games, but sometimes they're required for the game to be playable (such as the red girders in *Donkey Kong*, or the bumpers and buffers in *Pinball*). "The colour backgrounds are simply scanned with a standard desktop scanner and used in MAME as a background layer behind the LCD layer," says Henrik.

With the dumping process refined, there remained just one stumbling block – the scarcity of some G&W titles. Given their appeal, and their place in Nintendo's history, many of the rarer releases are in the hands of collectors. They can be picked up on the open market, but they often go for silly money, particularly the early Silver and Gold models, and the coveted Crystal Screen releases. "The hardest part of dumping and emulating these units was actually getting hold of them in the first place," says Henrik. "A few were my own but sourcing the remaining ones has been a team effort. Ryan Holtz has helped out with funding to acquire most of the G&W units."

Ryan Holtz is an American ex-pat currently living in Sweden who works as a programmer at Arrowhead Game Studios. As a long-time contributor to MAME, he watched the preservation effort from the sidelines for a while, before stepping in to help secure the required units. "I simply felt that it was something that needed doing", he says. "I'm in a lucky enough position to have a programming job at a decent salary, thus I tend to contribute funds towards digital preservation when and where I can. Vintage hardware certainly isn't getting any cheaper, after all. For the most part, nothing was ▶



PANORAMA SCREEN
LEFT
RIGHT
DONKEY KONG CIRCUS
GAME A
GAME B
TIME
GAME & WATCH
Nintendo
ACL
ALARM

terribly elusive, just expensive. A significant bulk of the G&W library was acquired in one go, when a collector here in Sweden was auctioning off what he had accumulated over the years. I knew it would end up costing a lot, and with that in mind I turned to Twitter, friends and even a few co-workers. Around 70 people in total contributed anywhere from 5-250 USD in order to make it happen. There were 34 units in the auction and the final price ended up being about 1,900 USD.”

The remaining units were then located one by one. “The hardest individual unit to track down was *Donkey Kong Circus*, and that was also the most expensive, ending up costing around 1,000 USD,” says Ryan. “Fortunately, an anonymous benefactor had appeared by that point and was willing to personally cover the last few acquisitions.”

Right now you’re possibly wondering if these expensive acquisitions become sacrificial lambs to the slaughter, with the units having to be destroyed in order to be dumped? Thankfully this was not the case. By the time Ryan became involved, Sean, with the help from Igor, had figured out how to dump the chips electronically. “The first few units were dumped using the acid decapsulation technique,” says Ryan, “which is naturally destructive to the unit itself. Once a method for dumping them electronically was discovered, quite a few units were able to be reassembled and resold in order to fund the acquisition of other units.

“That said, the last generation or two of G&W releases had an additional ‘melody ROM’ in order to have a more compelling auditory experience than simple ‘beep’ and ‘bip’ noises. Although Henrik was able to develop a method to more or less recover the melody data, those particular games will still need to be decapped for full optical verification of the ROM contents.”

> “ALL OF THE CASES ARE BASICALLY FRANKENSTEINS OF WEB FINDS THAT I COBBLED TOGETHER, STRAIGHTENED AND RECOLOURED”
> **LEE ROBSON**

The job of writing the SM5xx emulation and adding it to MAME was undertaken by the contributor known as ‘hap’ who lives in The Netherlands. He has programmed for MAME since 2008. “Sean and I had already been working on the emulation of early handhelds, mostly games like *Simon* and *Merlin*. It was only natural that other handhelds were to follow, and indeed, we emulated a lot of handheld games and added them to MAME,” he explains. “Around 2015, Sean started decapping the Konami LCD handhelds and the first game I got playable in MAME was Konami’s *Top Gun*. Sean decapped more games, including some G&W. There was a bug in the emulation that caused most of the G&W games to be unplayable. It turned out to be one-line fix, and suddenly the games made correct noises and responded to inputs.”

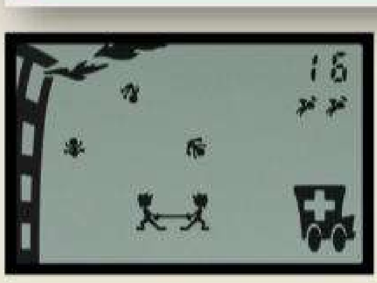
One remaining problem was how to display the SVG files that held the graphics in vectorised format. “Another MAME developer, Olivier Galibert, added an SVG renderer to MAME to solve that part,” says hap. “That’s when the ball got rolling and my programming for the MCU emulation and MAME driver was mostly done at this point. New game additions were mostly a matter of copy and pasting, since the games run on very similar hardware. I helped Henrik when he ran into problems adding new G&W dumps to MAME, but other than that, not much more programming was needed. Overall it was a lot of work and a lot of collaboration with other people. It was fun.”

The final touch – the artwork for the games – was provided by Lee Robson, who hails from Newcastle in the UK. “The artwork is something that was desperately needed to complete the experience,” says Lee, who’s also known as ‘hydef’. “When I started this project, the team had

ELECTRONIC TONICS

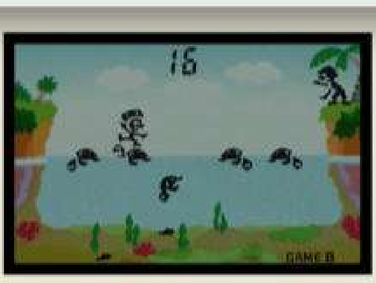
GREAT GAME & WATCH RELEASES THAT STILL HOLD UP

CRYSTAL SCREEN
CLIMBER
Nintendo
GAME & WATCH



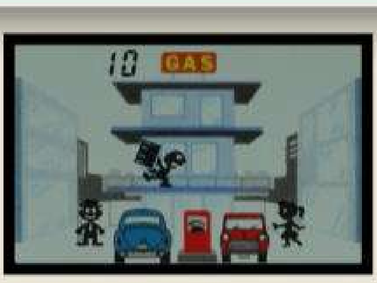
FIRE

People are bailing out of a burning building and, as the rescuers on the ground, you must bounce them over to the waiting ambulance. The hectic gameplay and high melodrama ensured that this was the first release to really strike a chord – and it remains great fun.



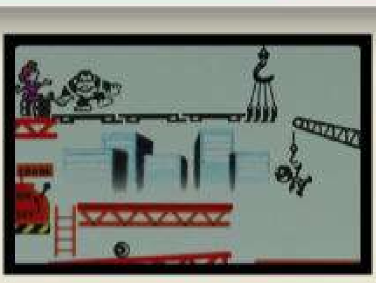
TURTLE BRIDGE

Using turtles as stepping stones, you have to trek back and forth across a river. However, the turtles often get distracted by passing fish and dive underwater, breaking the ‘bridge’. Another simple concept that’s anything but sedate, as you frantically try to avoid the drink.



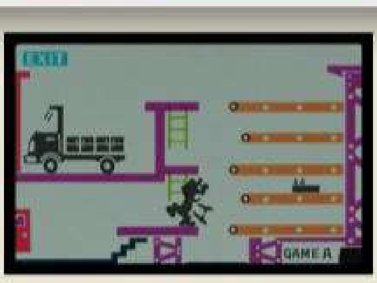
OIL PANIC

The first Multi Screen release really delivers on the concept. In the top screen, you catch the oil drips in your can, and when it’s full, you empty it over the side – ensuring that the guy with the barrel below is lined up. Clever co-ordination and quick skills are the order of the day.



DONKEY KONG

While everyone remembers the bright orange case, the game is pretty memorable too, being an approximation of the coin-op’s opening stage with the addition of a crane-swinging finale. It was the format’s first big seller and for many it remains the defining G&W release.



MARIO BROS

Unlike *Donkey Kong*, this outing was not based on the original coin-op. Instead of flipping critters in the sewers, Mario and Luigi are putting in a shift at a bottling company, working in tandem to avoid costly breakages. This is another game that makes good use of the dual screens.

DONKEY KONG II
GAME & WATCH
CONTROLLER
Nintendo
JUMP

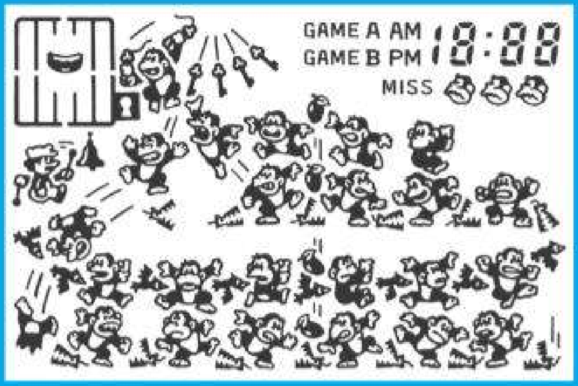
» The popular Multi Screen format debuted in 1982 and would go on to influence the design of the Nintendo DS handheld 22 years later.

already dumped and emulated a fair few of these games and produced some basic artwork. There was also an attempt on the forums by a member to implement the casing into the picture as well and that inspired me to also try and do this, but the best quality I could."

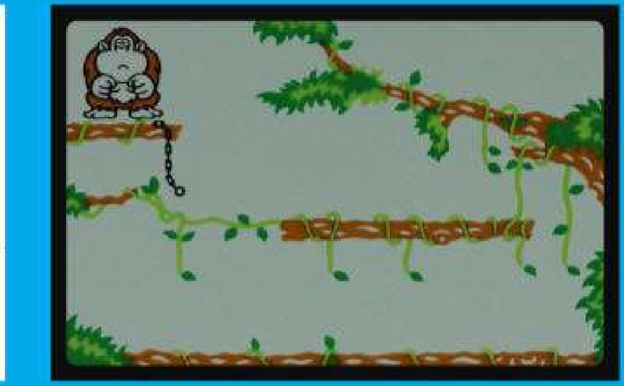
The addition of the cases is something that really brings G&W to life on MAME. They look almost better than the real thing, which begs the question, how has Lee managed to replicate them with such clarity and accuracy? "This may surprise some people, but I've never physically had any of these G&W games during the project. I only played some of them at school in the late-Eighties. All of the cases are basically Frankensteins of web finds that I cobbled together, straightened and recoloured. I then made these into a template that I could modify into new games since the different G&W models – Silver, Wide Screen, Multi Screen and so on – all have a particular styling. So for you to say that the artwork looks almost better than the real thing is a great compliment, as I don't actually know how they look in reality. The end product is supposed to look like a sort of promotional shoot on a plain surface for playing on your desktop

THE ART OF GAME & WATCH

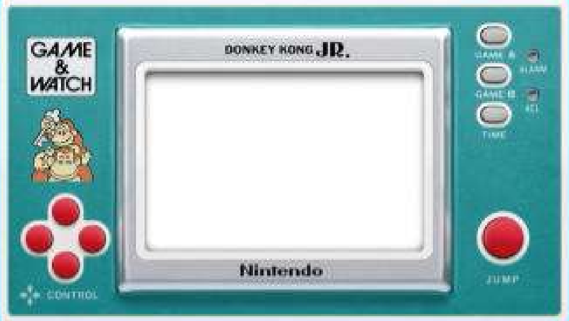
HOW THE DIFFERENT ARTWORK ELEMENTS COME TOGETHER



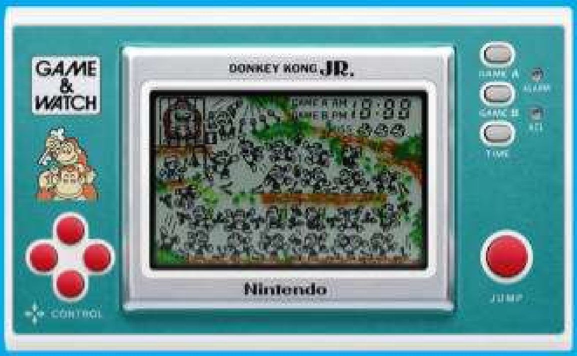
1 A photograph is taken of the LCD screen with all of the segments enabled. This is then vectorised to create an SVG file which is zipped up alongside the ROM data.



2 The background layer is scanned with a conventional scanner and then touched up to improve the colours. A separate version with a slight depth effect is also produced.

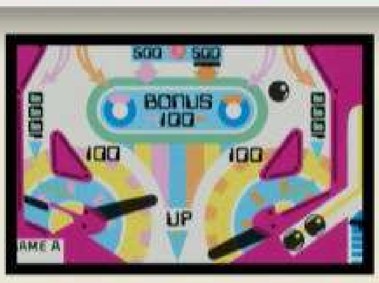


3 The case is created using a mixture of photos, scans and images from the internet. Templates are created so that it's easier to create cases for games in the same range.



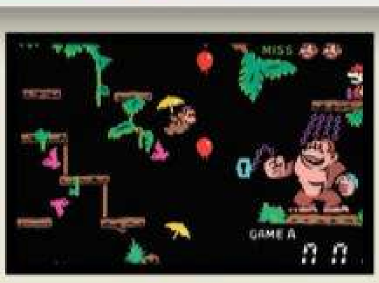
4 When the artwork is added to MAME, the SVG file, the background layer(s) and the case image are combined to create the composition. It's as close to the real thing as it gets.

MARIO BROS
CRYSTAL SCREEN
SUPER MARIO BROS.
Nintendo
GAME & WATCH
TURTLE BRIDGE
WIDE SCREEN
DONKEY KONG
PINBALL



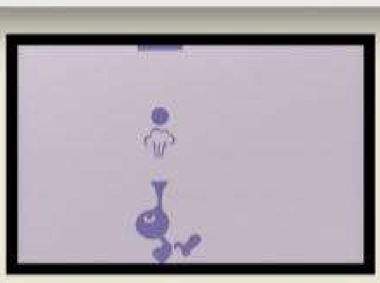
PINBALL

This was the 38th G&W release overall, and yet Nintendo kept redefining what was possible with the LCD technology. Here we have a pinball sim that presents a nice-looking table that's surprisingly playable. The sound is a little grating, but at least you can mute that in MAME.



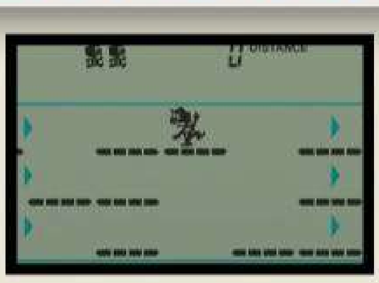
DONKEY KONG JR

The first Table Top game, and therefore the first G&W release with colour graphics. It's different to the earlier New Wide Screen game, and not necessarily better, but the colour really pops as you traverse a jungle maze and cross a river on another quest to rescue DK.



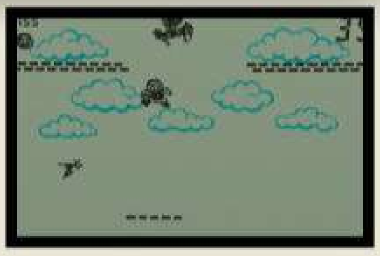
SPITBALL SPARKY

The G&W range is full of oddities and the Super Color format is chief among them. This game, however, is one of the most inventive available, being a clone of *Breakout* that shouldn't really work, but somehow does. The other Super Color game, *Crab Grab*, is also worth a look.



SUPER MARIO BROS

It wasn't a shock to see *SMB* added to the range, but it was surprising to find that it (kinda) resembled the NES game – including multiple scrolling levels. A wonderful game to play, especially if you're lucky enough to experience it on the original Crystal Screen model.



CLIMBER

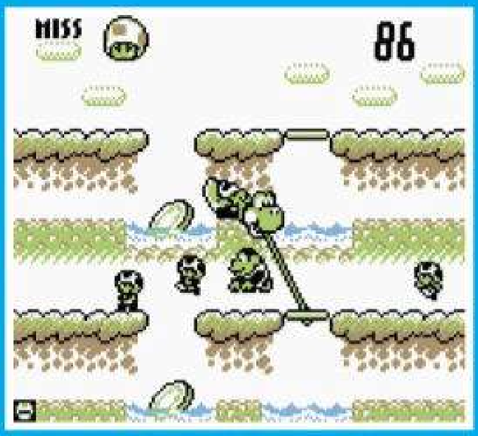
Similar to *SMB*, but with vertically-scrolling levels, this is perhaps an even better game. Using the platforms, you climb ever upwards, dodging enemies as you go. You even get to battle an evil dragon boss at the summit! For many G&W fans this remains the go-to game.

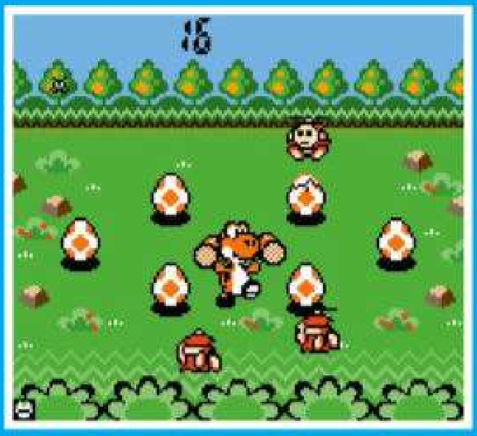
MODERN MAKEOVERS

WE EXAMINE THE BEST OF NINTENDO'S FUNKIFIED UPDATES

MANHOLE

From the first *G&W Gallery* (1997), *Manhole* was one of four early titles given a fun modern makeover. Here, Yoshi has to raise the manhole covers to prevent Toads and other irritants from falling through. This original Game Boy title was colourised on Super Game Boy.



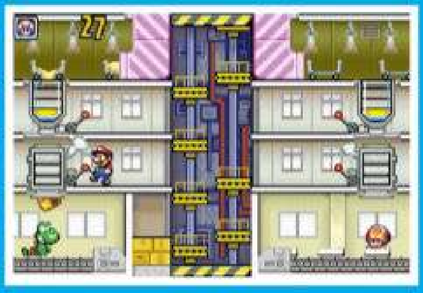


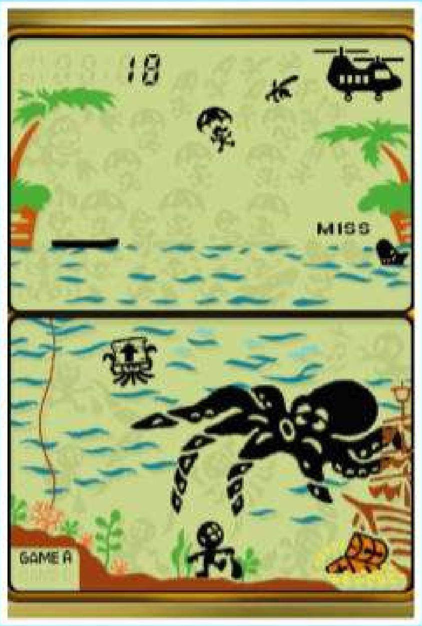
VERMIN

This update is the highlight of *G&W Gallery 2* (1998). The rats from the original are replaced by invading Koopas, Fly Guys and Boos which Yoshi must smash before they attack his eggs. Yoshi now moves in a circular direction; the result is akin to a super cute version of *Tempest*.

MARIO'S CEMENT FACTORY

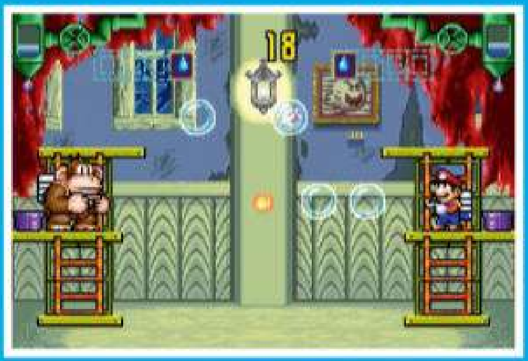
This perhaps should have been retitled *Mario's Cookie Factory*, because now Mario has to manage the flow of cookie dough through his death trap of a factory. At least the lifts are now more forgiving. This was one of 11 updates included on *G&W Gallery Advance* (2002).





PARACHUTE X OCTOPUS

G&W Collection 2 for Nintendo DS (which was a Club Nintendo exclusive) features classic versions of *Parachute*, *Octopus* and this, a clever dual screen mash-up of the two. The action alternates between saving parachutists and stealing treasure from octi's lair.

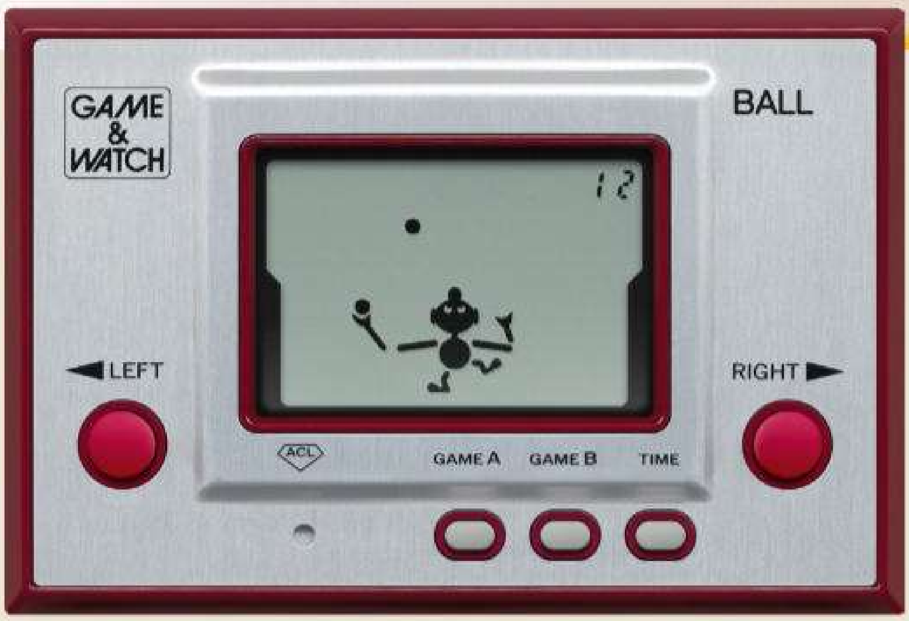


DONKEY KONG 3

Another charming update found on *G&W Gallery Advance*. Scrawny Stanley from the original is replaced by Mario (of course) who faces off against Donkey Kong in a bubble blastathon. In a neat touch, this and fellow Micro Vs System game *Boxing* offer a two-player link-up mode.

GAME & WATCH
SUPER MARIO BROS.
Nintendo
SUPER MARIO BROS
GAME & WATCH

» Nintendo hasn't forgotten about G&W, as evidenced by the limited edition handheld released to celebrate the 35th anniversary of *Super Mario Bros* and the *Zelda* Game & Watch announced at this year's E3.



» The G&W craze kicked off in April 1980 with the release of *Ball*. Several later games would revisit the simple juggling theme.

43 POINTS
GAME
TIME
ALARM
ACL
JUMP
CONTROLLER
SUPER MARIO BROS.
Nintendo

» There are 60 G&W titles in total – 59 retail releases, and this special edition of *Super Mario Bros* which was given away as part of a competition in Japan. It was limited to 10,000 units.

COLOUR SCREEN
SUPER MARIO BROS.
Nintendo

PC. It's meant to look clean and elegant. Some people don't like that part of it, but I was doing what I like." Lee spent around 18 months working through the backlog and then began to include the new releases as they were added to MAME. "After a while of catching up with the new releases I partnered with Henrik and he'd send me scans of the background layers and scans of the cases if I needed them. This meant that I was able to release the artwork before the next version of MAME. For the background layers I fiddled with the colours depending on how I thought they should appear and gave the graphics a depth/shadow effect, to mimic the polarisation process. I let users have different viewing options so that they can play how they like, by turning the shadows off or even removing the case and being left with only the screen. I think they look good as just screens too. They even have a frame."

> "NINTENDO COULD, AND I EVEN FEEL SHOULD, REISSUE THE GAMES ON A MODERN PLATFORM"
> **DAVID HAYWOOD**

Lee worked on the project as a hobby and it was a labour of love – for the most part. "Everything required a lot of going back and forth to refine the way things looked," he admits. "Trying to maintain consistency across the units often meant having to change many files in my templates and the code which decides where they're drawn on the screen. I eventually quit the project shy of doing the lot because it was affecting my mental health and I love to self-sabotage everything I do. Fortunately a fellow called Matthew Marino [DarthMarino] picked up the last few and finished them using earlier assets and his own background work."

The G&W project was effectively completed in August 2020 when the final game, *Donkey Kong Hockey*, was added to MAME (in version 0.223). There are still some items on the to-do list, but these mainly involve dumping rare ROM variants and the 'melody ROM' verification issue that Ryan mentioned. The end result is another coup for MAME and a landmark in game preservation.

"It's definitely a milestone, but also a phenomenal display of teamwork and technical accomplishment," reflects David Haywood, who has produced videos of all of the G&W releases running in MAME for his YouTube channel (search for 'mamehaze'). "Reaching the milestone was the culmination of many years of work and improvements to the MAME codebase to allow for it. It was also a moment of realisation, seeing that MAME could do something that even just ten years ago was considered impossible, and not only do it, but do it convincingly. Many ventures within MAME end up hitting brick walls, where a limit to our understanding is reached or technical roadblocks cannot be overcome. Some also end up stalling as those involved simply become burnt out. But here, the teamwork on display, centred around a driven group of developers with complementary skills, saw this one to fruition. It's something that will remain a highlight of recent development for years to come."

David is also optimistic that it will encourage others to embark on similar projects. "I hope it makes people more curious about the technology they do own and spurs research for cases that are still problematic. Outside of G&W there are still hundreds, if not thousands of similar handhelds, but instead of using known MCUs they're using COB [Chip-On-Board] technology, where everything is self-contained on a die under a single epoxy glob. For many of these there is still no clear path to getting them emulated. Seeing that MAME is capable of handling the emulation side, I hope it might motivate more people to look for solutions to the technical hurdles."

Now that all of the G&W titles have been emulated, there's always a chance that Nintendo might want in on the progress. After all, the company has revisited the G&W concept multiple times in the past, including the seven compilations released between 1995 and 2008, and the versions later released as DSiWare. And of course, there was the *Super Mario Bros: 35th Anniversary* G&W released in 2020 that was modelled on the Gold range and featured an updated version of the very first G&W title, *Ball*. It's easy to imagine a complete collection for the Switch at some point.

"Nintendo could, and I even feel should, reissue the games on a modern platform," says David, who emphasises that it would cost Nintendo nothing to license them. "The MAME code specific to supporting the G&W units is all available under the BSD 3-Clause licence, which makes it as easy as possible for Nintendo to come along and use that code. The licence doesn't place any restrictions on using it in closed source commercial projects, as long as proper accreditation is given. The recent *Capcom Arcade Stadium* is able to use properly licensed code from current versions of MAME for this reason too. Community emulation ventures shouldn't be seen as at odds with the commercial market, but instead be seen as something that complements it – especially when we're dealing with material like this." *

Many thanks to all of the interviewees for their enthusiasm for answering endless questions.

MAME MILESTONES

KEY UPDATES IN THE QUEST TO PRESERVE HANDHELD ELECTRONIC GAMES

MAY 2017 0.186

G&W title *Mickey & Donald* was actually added to Release 0.164 in July 2015, as a non-working game. Here it is finally promoted to working, and included alongside *Boxing*, *Donkey Kong II* and *Mario's Cement Factory*. Several Konami handhelds are also added.

ELECTRONIC
SEGA
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

JULY 2017 0.188

The first batch of handheld games from Tiger Electronics are supported, including *Double Dragon*, *Gauntlet* and *Sonic*. More Konami games are added. In terms of G&W, *Mickey Mouse* and its clone *Egg* are now supported, and some titles receive vector backgrounds.

OCTOBER 2018 0.203

After a brief hiatus, support for the remaining G&W titles returns in earnest. This release sees perhaps the most popular game added, the original *Donkey Kong*, plus fellow Multi Screen title *Green House*. Over the next 12 months the bulk of G&W games are added.

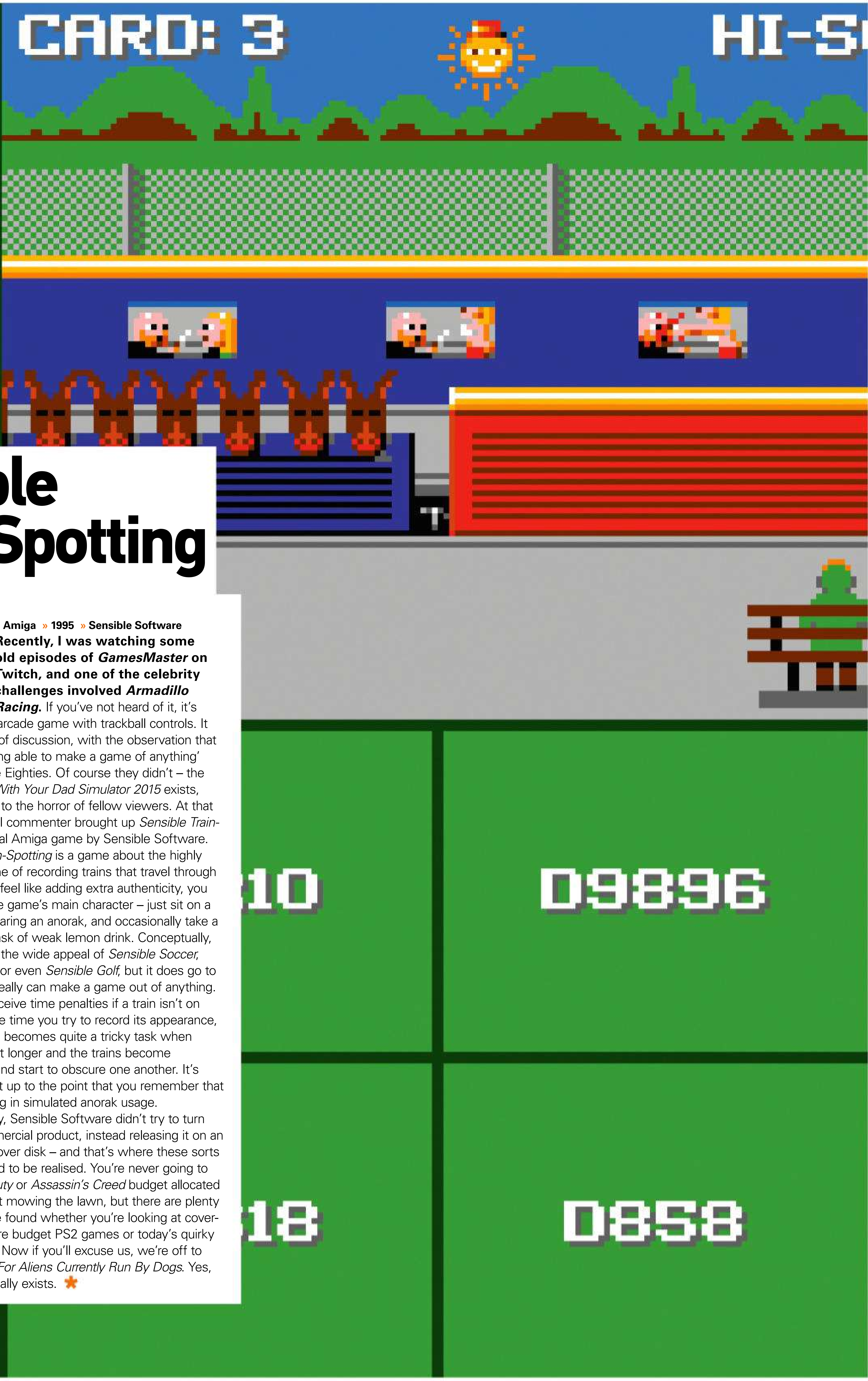
AUGUST 2020 0.223

With support for the Micro Vs System title *Donkey Kong Hockey* added in this release, all 60 official G&W titles are working in MAME – an amazing achievement by all those involved. A number of items are still on the to-do list, but all of the games are now perfectly playable.

DONKEY KONG HOCKEY
Nintendo
MICRO VS. SYSTEM

FEBRUARY 2021 0.229

MAME (and MESS before it) had included support for some Mattel Electronics games previously. More titles are added here, including *Hockey*, *Soccer* and *Basketball*. Work is underway on supporting the first ever handheld LED game, *Mattel Auto Race* from 1976.



Sensible Train-Spotting

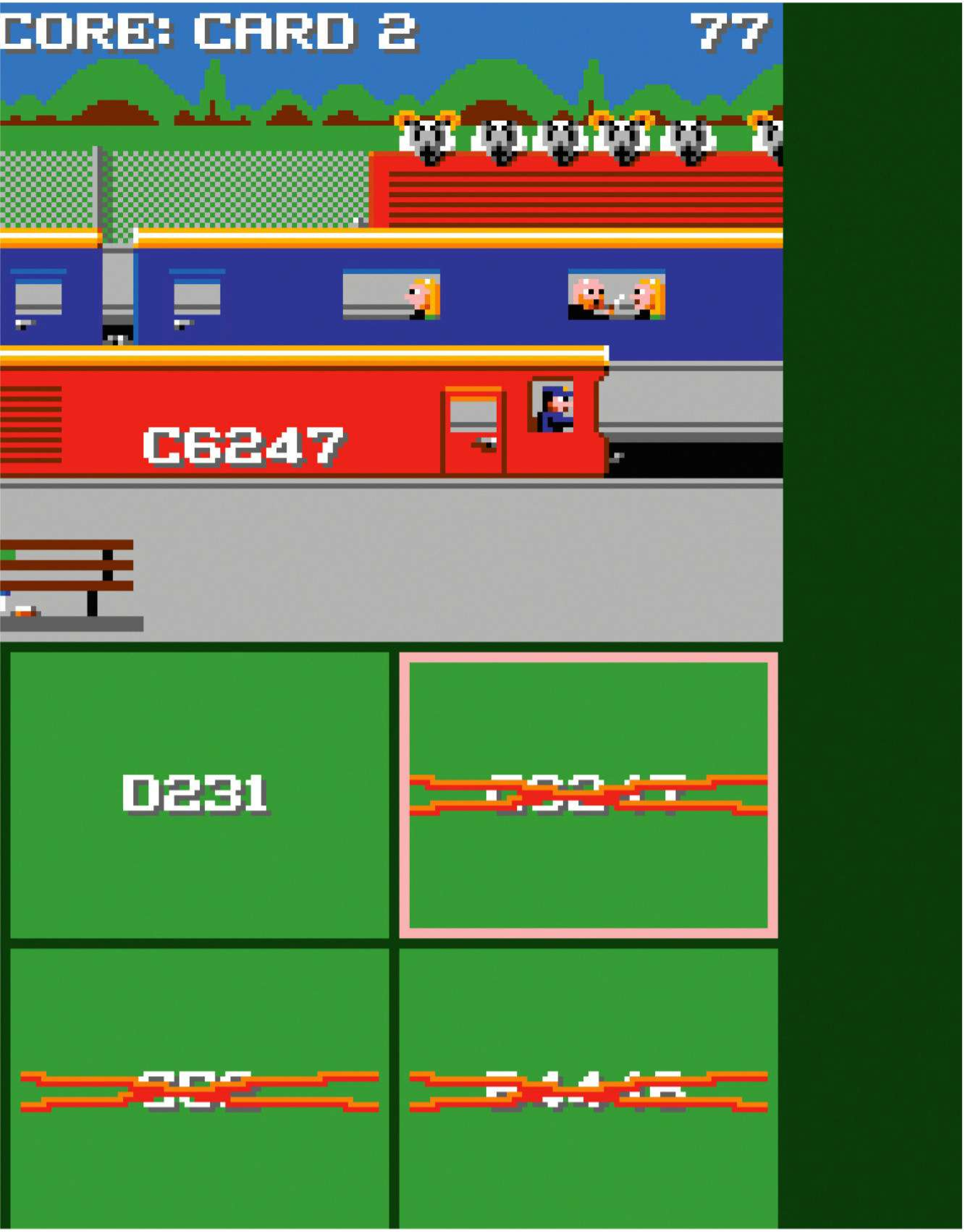
I LIKE TRAINS

» Amiga » 1995 » Sensible Software

Recently, I was watching some old episodes of *GamesMaster* on Twitch, and one of the celebrity challenges involved *Armadillo Racing*. If you've not heard of it, it's an odd Namco arcade game with trackball controls. It generated a bit of discussion, with the observation that the days of 'being able to make a game of anything' didn't end in the Eighties. Of course they didn't – the game *Shower With Your Dad Simulator 2015* exists, as I pointed out to the horror of fellow viewers. At that point the original commenter brought up *Sensible Train-Spotting*, the final Amiga game by Sensible Software.

Sensible Train-Spotting is a game about the highly regarded pastime of recording trains that travel through a station. If you feel like adding extra authenticity, you could imitate the game's main character – just sit on a bench while wearing an anorak, and occasionally take a sip from your flask of weak lemon drink. Conceptually, it perhaps lacks the wide appeal of *Sensible Soccer*, *Cannon Fodder* or even *Sensible Golf*, but it does go to show that you really can make a game out of anything. Because you receive time penalties if a train isn't on the screen at the time you try to record its appearance, filling your cards becomes quite a tricky task when the numbers get longer and the trains become more frequent and start to obscure one another. It's compelling, right up to the point that you remember that you are engaging in simulated anorak usage.

Unsurprisingly, Sensible Software didn't try to turn this into a commercial product, instead releasing it on an *Amiga Power* cover disk – and that's where these sorts of concepts tend to be realised. You're never going to see a *Call Of Duty* or *Assassin's Creed* budget allocated to a game about mowing the lawn, but there are plenty of oddities to be found whether you're looking at cover-disk jokes, bizarre budget PS2 games or today's quirky indie favourites. Now if you'll excuse us, we're off to play *An Airport For Aliens Currently Run By Dogs*. Yes, *of course* it actually exists. ✱


CORE: CARD 2
77
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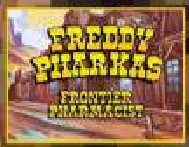
D231

THE MAKING OF

FREDDY PHARKAS FRONTIER PHARMACIST



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** SIERRA ON-LINE
- » **DEVELOPER:** SIERRA ON-LINE
- » **RELEASED:** 1993 (FLOPPY), 1994 (CD-ROM)
- » **PLATFORM:** PC, MAC
- » **GENRE:** POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE

ONE OF SIERRA ON-LINE'S LESSER-KNOWN NINETIES ADVENTURES IS A ROOTIN'-TOOTIN' TREASURE LADEN WITH WESTERN LORE AND GAGS GALORE. JOSH MANDEL'S WITTY TAKE ON FRONTIER LIFE FEATURED A MOST UNUSUAL TAKE ON THE COWBOY LEGEND WITH ITS PRESCRIPTION-FILLING, SCHOOLMARM-COURTING HERO...

WORDS BY GEM WHEELER

When you're facing a stampede of snails, deadly levels of horse flatulence and a no-good schoolmarm, only one man can save the day. Pharkas, Freddy Pharkas: peerless, earless and free.

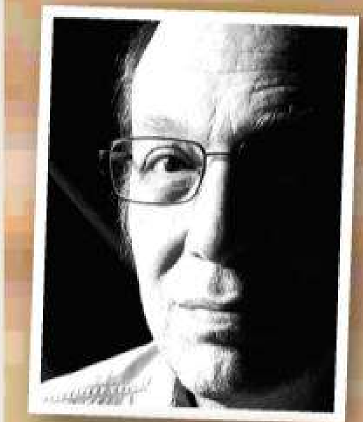
If this sounds like your kind of game, then congratulations, pardner – ya got a treat in store. Al Lowe and Josh Mandel brought us a western adventure that's a hidden gem in Sierra On-Line's extensive back catalogue. The exploits of the gunslinger-turned-chemist feature devious puzzling, a rich cast of characters and more background jokes than any other point-and-click title you can name.

Writer and former stand-up comic Josh had impressed Sierra's CEO Ken Williams with his comedy performance at the 1990 company Christmas party, and he was thrilled when his boss approached him to work on a humour-driven game with senior designer Al Lowe. The two men had already worked together successfully on Al's raunchy, riotous *Leisure Suit Larry* titles and their spin-off, *The Laffer Utilities*, a set of *Larry*-themed 'non-productivity' programs that took a gentle swipe at Norton. As Josh explains, Sierra used a 'star system' at the time: established designers' names would be attached to a project, while an up-and-comer would be given a dry run at the tough slog of putting the game together.

Al, a born storyteller, relates how Freddy's unusual name came about. Brainstorming ideas for the title at a meeting with Josh and Roberta Williams, he started to suggest that Freddy should be a farmer, changed it to rancher, and ended up saying "pharmacist". The idea tickled them. "Why couldn't he be a pharmacist?" Alliteration did the rest.

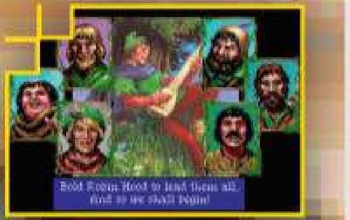
Freddy's profession is a source of some of the game's biggest laughs. Al, who owned a fabulously lethal-sounding Gilbert chemistry set as a kid, loved the idea of prescription-filling puzzles which, in time-honoured Sierra fashion, did double duty as a copy protection system. "We just went through a bunch of old medical books from the period. For the things that weren't jokes, that were plot-important, we used the real stuff. The rest of the chemicals on the wall, we just filled in with some phoney things that we made up that were funny, and some things that were actually used in the period."

» Designer Al Lowe's best known for his hilarious *Leisure Suit Larry* games.



» Josh Mandel designed, directed and produced *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist*.

» Artist Ruben Huante gave Freddy's characters their distinctive visual appeal.

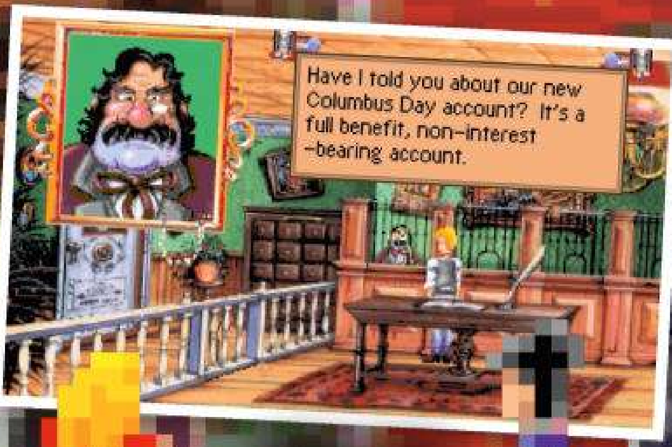


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

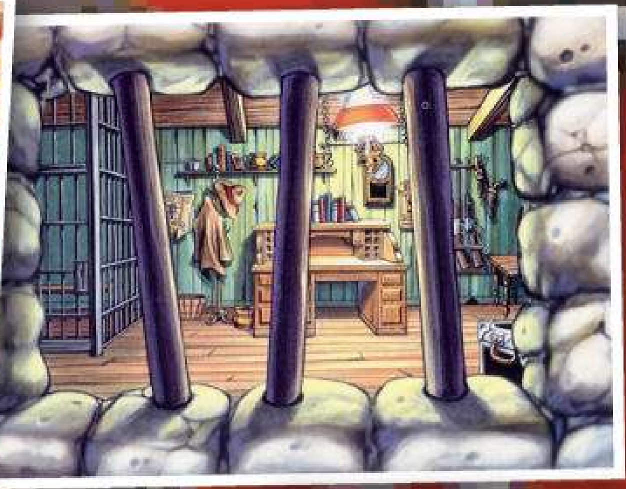
LEISURE SUIT LARRY 6: SHAPE UP OR SLIP OUT!
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1993

GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1993

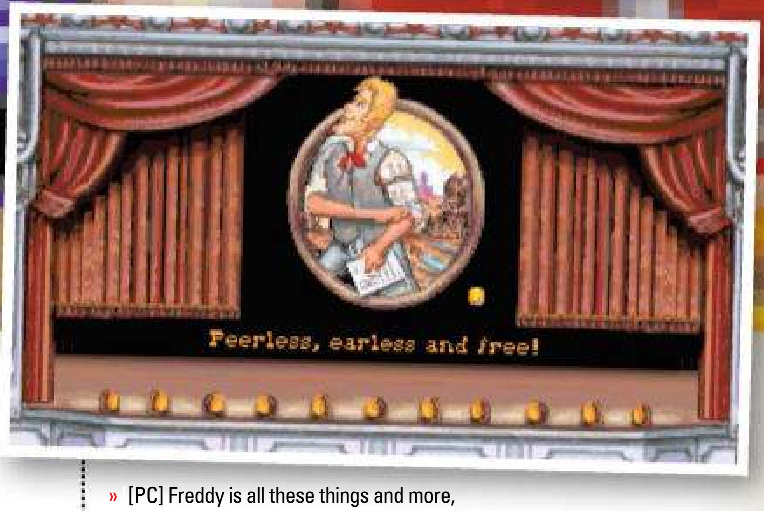
CONQUESTS OF THE LONGBOW: THE LEGEND OF ROBIN HOOD (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1991


Have I told you about our new Columbus Day account? It's a full benefit, non-interest -bearing account.

» [PC] The game's rich and colourful character design is one of its many memorable qualities.



» The cramped and dingy jail is one of artist Ruben Huante's favourite locations in the game.


Peerless, earless and free!

» [PC] Freddy is all these things and more, as you'll discover when playing the game.

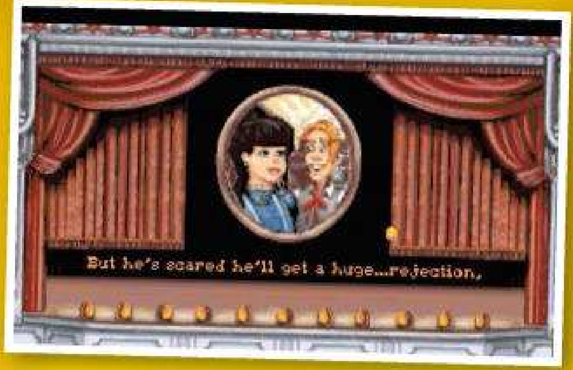
> “I HAD ALREADY WORKED A LITTLE WITH AL LOWE, SO I KNEW IT WOULD AT LEAST BE PRETTY FUNNY IF NOTHING ELSE”
>
> **KARIN A NESTOR**

Animator Karin A Nestor – then Karin Young and fresh out of art school – was just finishing work on Sierra's *Ecoquest* when she was recruited for *Freddy*. “Honestly, I was never really a fan of westerns, but I had already worked a little with Al Lowe on the VGA upgrade of *Larry 1* when I first started with the company, so I knew it would at least be pretty funny if nothing else.” Character designer Ruben Huante was another relative newcomer at Sierra who'd previously contributed art to *Laura Bow 2: The Dagger Of Amon Ra*. He recalls the lively atmosphere as he swapped ideas with lead artist Bob Gleason (“he was a character!”) and listened to composer Aubrey Hodges' rousing theme, “We always had the western music going in the office, over and over… you knew what the animators were doing, you could ask the programmers questions. It was a real team effort. Al was there quite a bit, and Josh was there every day working with us,” he says. Ruben remembers Josh and Al as great company: funny guys who were a hoot to toil alongside.

Programmer William R Shockley also cherishes fond memories of the camaraderie between the “mixed bag of misfits” who made up the creative team. He had the honour of providing the voice for several of *Freddy*'s audio cues. “It was fun being the voice of the ‘Score’ heard every time you scored a point, as it appears I used that word a lot at the time! I was also the big, loud ‘Yeehaw!’ at the beginning of the game, and I remember blowing out the ears of the recording booth as they didn't have the levels ready when I belted out the words. Having outtakes during the end credits was also a first, I believe. It was such a great addition to the style of the game and team.”

This wasn't the only innovation they came up with, as William notes. “It's been a while, and my memory might be a bit foggy, but on a system level, I believe we were the first to use animated side-scrolling, including the huge eight-panel-long main street of Coarsegold. Also, the sepia-tone palette fade might have been a first as well, but what I remember most is trying to get that darn bouncing ball synched to the opening ballad! The system group came up with a great way to actually add sync points to the music files, so that we could force the ball to move quickly in order to catch up on slower machines. *Freddy* was also the first game where we added special messages in DOS when you exited the game.”

Wary of inadvertently lifting jokes from other people's work, Josh steered well clear of one obvious comic reference. “I actually specifically avoided watching *Blazing Saddles* as soon as I knew I was going to be working on the game.” Freddy's cheerful innuendoes won't offend many players, but Josh pushed for an even more family-friendly approach. “Due to all the *Larry* games, Al had a reputation among gamers as an ‘adults only’ designer, and I felt that would hamper us. The concept of a western adventure was a long shot, sales-wise, to begin with. To hamper it further by making it non-family friendly seemed to be a big potential disadvantage. Maybe Al felt that players were going to expect some off-colour humour from an Al Lowe game, or maybe he just felt that the ►


But he's scared he'll get a huge...rejection.

FREDDY'S THEME

HOW THE WEST WAS SUNG

The CD-ROM version of *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist*'s introductory theme song is pure comedy gold, thanks to Al Lowe's vocals, which made Josh's already hysterical lyrics even funnier. “You know, I tried to hire somebody who could sing worse than I could!” Al jokes of his decision to perform the *Ballad Of Freddy Pharkas* himself.

Recording the ditty was enormous fun for Al, himself a musician and teacher before the gaming world came calling. “That was one of the high days of my life. We hired a man who had retired to Oakhurst from Hollywood, and he had been the number one harmonica player in the recording studios for the movies and television.” (This sounds like legendary musician Tommy Morgan, but Al's no longer sure.) “We got our friends, who were good musicians – and cheap! – to record two takes. I had headphones on, and he improvised based on what I sang. If you listen to that recording, you can hear: there's a dialogue between the voice and harmonica. I'm telling you, it was a joy to make music with that guy.” The line lamenting Freddy's fear of a huge… rejection as he courts Penelope Primm is a classic example of Josh's wit and Al's comic timing harmonising perfectly.

» Karin A Nestor had the tough task of handling the game's many animations.

» Programmer William R Shockley is still working in the old Sierra On-Line building almost 30 years later!

situation warranted some raunch. I would've liked to err on the side of allowing us the widest possible audience."

> "THERE WAS NO 3D MAGIC YET, SO YOU HAD TO HAVE SEPARATE VIEWS FOR EACH SIDE OF THE CHARACTER"
> **KARIN A NESTOR**

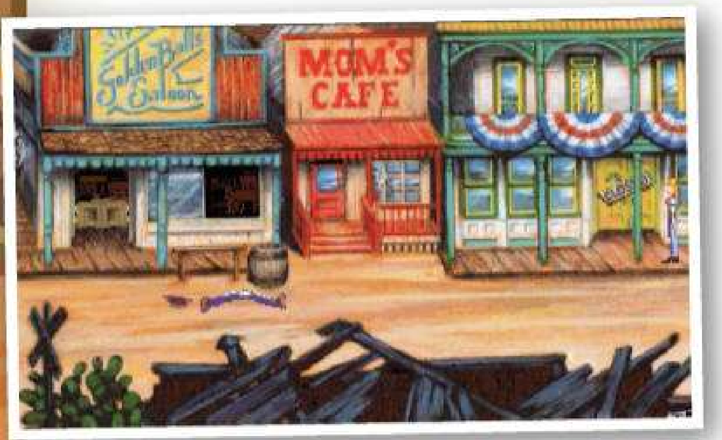
When it came to graphics, Josh was determined to ensure that *Freddy* had a distinctive look. "We definitely didn't want the same style that the *Larry* games were using in those days: the jaunty, sort of Sixties-retro style you see in *Leisure Suit Larry 1* and *Leisure Suit Larry 5*," he continues. "That was something that [producer] Bill Davis had developed to try to give Sierra games a unifying art style, but we soon found it fit Larry most of all. I think that style would've been a mismatch for *Freddy*. But I knew I wanted cartoony because I knew there would be a lot of physical humour, and I think a naturalistic art style would've clashed with that. I wanted characters who could 'squash and stretch' in animation terms."

It was Ruben's job to create the unforgettable characters that *Freddy* fans love, and he still has some of the richly detailed designs he came up with. "I would do a sketch in pencil, and they'd give approval on that, then I'd paint it in acrylics." Consistency was the goal, and Ruben worked hard with Bob Gleason to make sure that the character design was both unique and part of a cohesive look. "That's kind of hard to do, and me and Bob didn't have the same style at all." Nonetheless, they pulled it off.

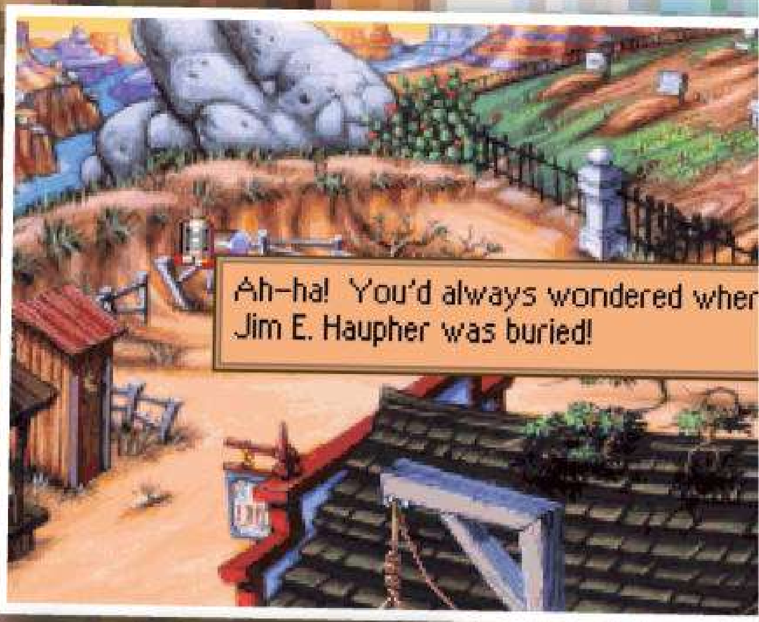
Ruben picks out one particular setting he loves, among many lively locations: the town jail. "This was my favourite room. You'd see a prisoner in the jail who'd walk in every now and then, and it was always one of us! If you clicked on them, it'd tell you what they were in for. I was an artist, so I was in for graffiti." Ruben's artistic careers led him away from game design in recent years, but he says he'd love to revisit that world. Looking at his stunning work, the industry would be very lucky indeed to have him back.

Karin describes just how complicated bringing Ruben's characters to pixelated life could be. "Ah, the 2D animation process of olden times. How it worked at Sierra [was that], from the character model sheet, you would create a pixelated version in D-Paint or the View Editor, Sierra's in-house animation tool, of each angle of the character. Front, back, left and right. For the main characters that would include 3/4 front and back angles as well. There was no 3D magic yet, so you had to have separate views for each side of the character. From these single cels you would create a walk cycle for each angle using usually like eight to ten frames.

"Pushing pixels, as they say. Basically redrawing a large part of each frame. When Sierra started hiring people trained in hand-drawn animation, we would draw the characters on animation paper, then shoot each frame with a stat camera mounted above a peg bar. It would automatically put what you shot into a loop in the View Editor.

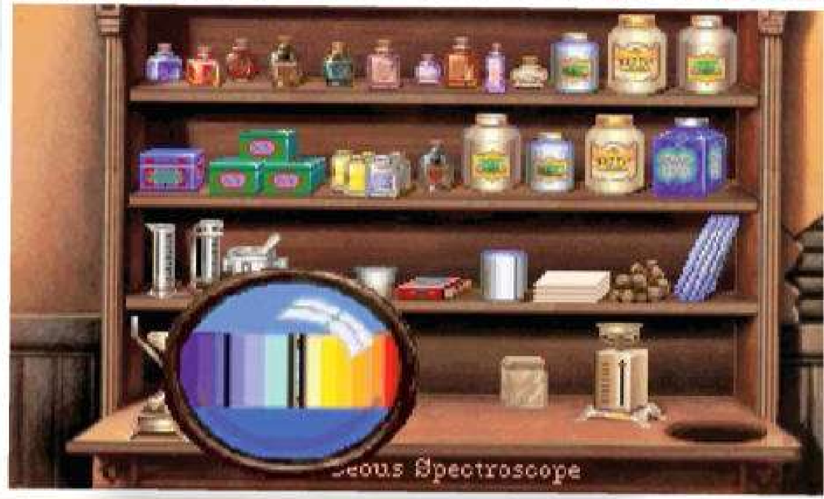


» [PC] It won't be too long before you get to witness the aftermath of a proper Old West brawl.



Ah-ha! You'd always wondered wher
Jim E. Haupher was buried!

» [PC] Click on everything to enjoy one of the gags Josh Mandel included in the game's many descriptions.

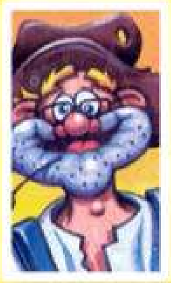


» [PC] Freddy's laboratory is an ingenious copy protection system and a source of several puzzles that will win over the townsfolk.

MEET THE CAST

GET ACQUAINTED WITH SOME OF COARSEGOLD'S FINEST

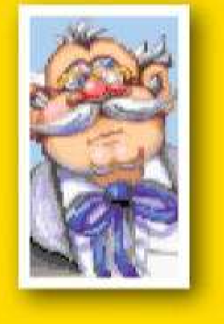
WHITTLIN' WILLY



Voiced by:
LEWIS ARQUETTE

■ Josh says, "Whittlin' Willy was definitely one of my favourites… he could be involved in the game action, or he could break the fourth wall and comment on it. I also enjoyed giving him just a touch of the dirty old man, which you don't often see in a narrator."

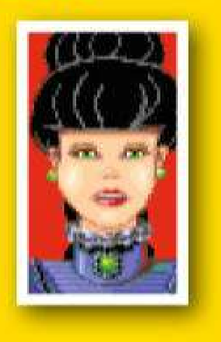
DOC GILLESPIE



Voiced by:
BILL BRYANT

■ A Frank Capra classic gave Josh some ideas when developing the character. "I also liked writing Doc Gillespie, because I had fun modelling him on Lionel Barrymore's performance as Mr Potter in *It's A Wonderful Life*… only drunker."

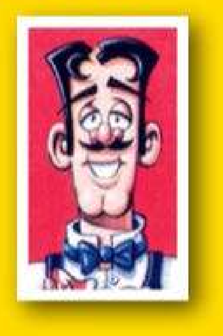
PENELOPE PRIMM



Voiced by:
KATH SOUCIE

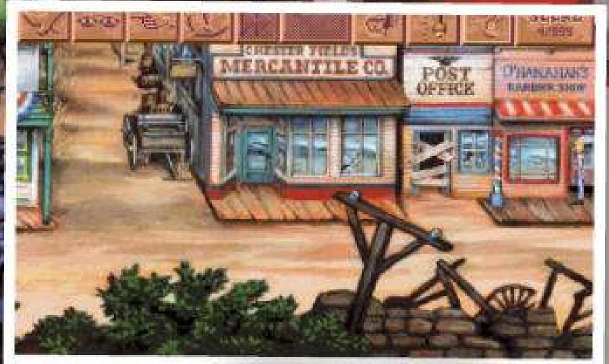
■ Penelope would have returned as a *Phantom Of The Opera*-style figure, had Josh got his sequel. "And now that I've talked about it, everyone who reads this will know that it's Penelope behind the mask, so I'd have to think of a whole 'nuther plot anyway."

SAM ANDREAS



Voiced by:
JAN RABSON

■ Sam is a laconic bartender in the tradition of the Old West. Don't bore him with your life story. Ruben jokes that Sam's amusing name – a reference to the San Andreas Fault – got a nod in the character design. "He had a jagged line in his hair!"

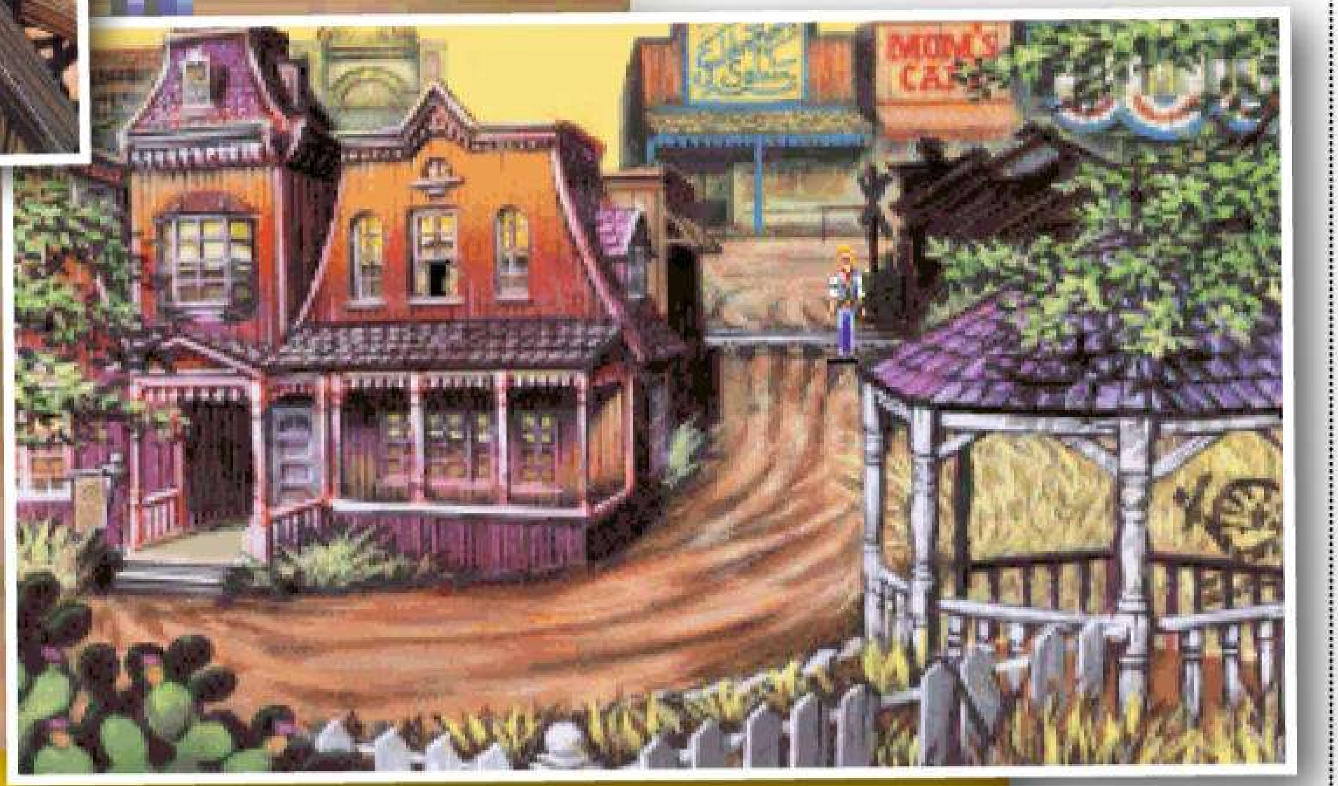


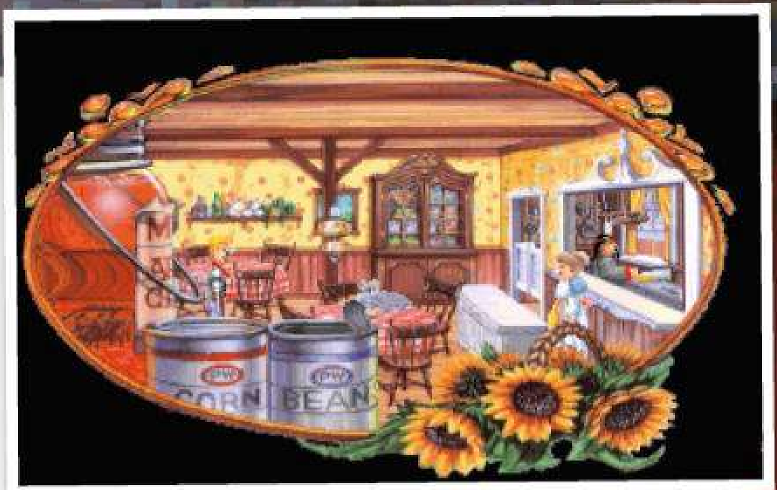
» [PC] *Freddy* uses the intuitive, icon-driven point-and-click interface that distinguishes Sierra titles of this era.

"From there you'd clean it up and colour it in to be a final segment the programmers could take and implement into the game. Time-consuming? You betcha! We ran into the problem on *Freddy* that we didn't have enough artists or animators to get everything done within the time constraints. I think it was [animator] Phy Williams and I who came up with her taking copies of the pencil-drawn originals, painting each one of them, then scanning each one in to put in the View Editor. It wasn't as crisp-looking as art in the other games and a lot of times it wouldn't line up quite right, but I think it saved our skin in getting it all done with our limited resources."

The game's structure was just as carefully planned. "The original design document had three acts," Josh explains. "The act breaks came at very logical locations that the story itself suggested; there wasn't a lot of 'jiggering' that had to be done to find natural breaks. The only two major changes we made were [that] we removed an entire section of town, basically a Chinatown, that we thought was too racially questionable – it was bad enough what we did with [Chinese and Indian characters] Hop Singh and Srini, neither of which I think we could get away with these days – and we added a fourth act, when I pushed for a more drawn-out denouement and a longer overall experience."

» [PC] Madame Ovaree's brothel is not a location you can access by day, so don't bother knocking.





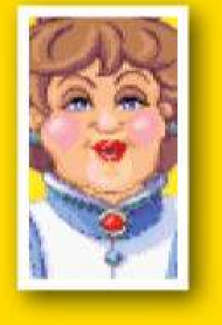
» [PC] Mom's Café is a lovely example of the quirky art style that gives the game such a distinctive look.

Josh feels that we might have got another adventure with Freddy, if only marketing had been a little quicker on the draw. "I would keep the marketing and sales departments apprised of *Freddy*'s progress. At that time, it was highly unusual for a game to come out on schedule and on budget… almost unheard of. So one day, a couple of weeks after the game was finished, on schedule and on budget, and had been packaged and shipped by the production department, I bumped into the head of sales in the hallway, and he said, 'By the way, how's Freddy coming along?' I said, 'It's finished. It's been duplicated. It's already shipped.' His jaw dropped. He said, and this struck fear into my heart, 'Oh! Oh, my! Well, I better start selling it then!' That was particularly worrisome for me because a game's biggest sales were always during the first few weeks of its release."

Steady sales led to a successful CD-ROM conversion, but Josh had moved on to new projects by then, and a sequel never materialised. Instead, we're left with special memories of a true Sierra one-off. ✱

Many thanks to Ruben Huante and Josh Mandel for all their help.

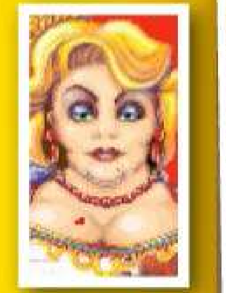
HELEN BACK



Voiced by:
SUSAN SILO

■ Helen Back is the proprietor of Mom's Café. As a lady of moral rectitude and good 19th-century manners, she won't permit Frederick Pharkas any first-name familiarities… which is why she insists on being called Mom. Oh well. If you ask nicely, she might let you have a baked-bean can. Trust us, you'll need it.

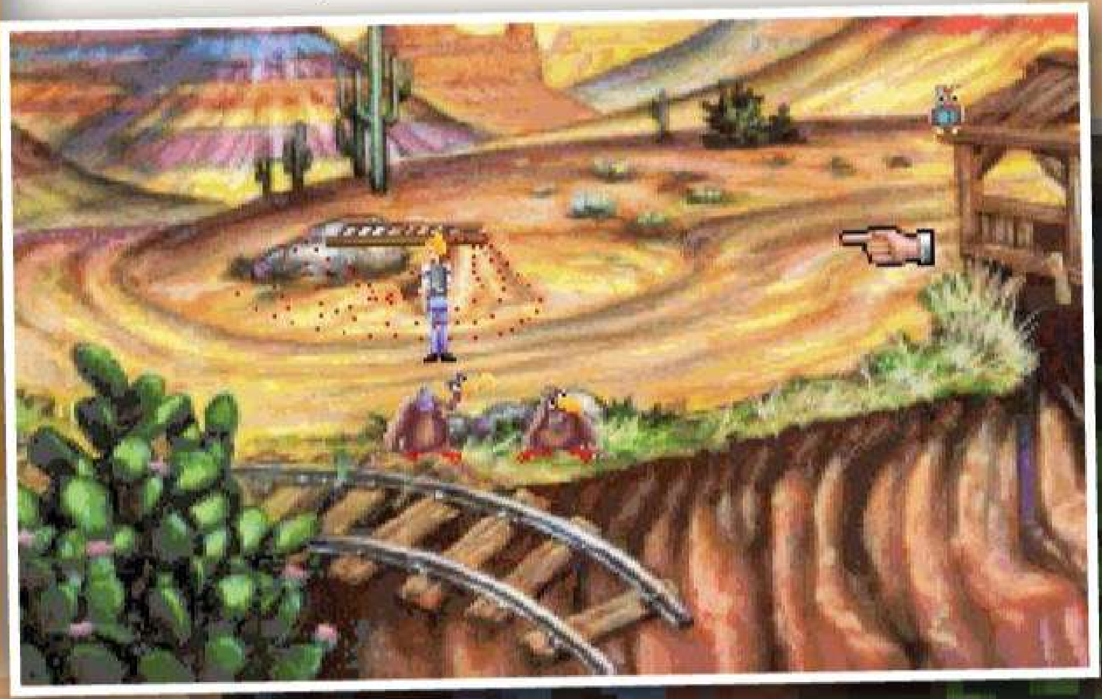
MADAME OVAREE



Voiced by:
SUSAN SILO

■ Freddy's confidante Madame Ovaree is absolutely, positively not to be confused with a certain troubled Flaubertian housewife. Her brothel is occupied by ladies with whom *Leisure Suit Larry* would have liked to be acquainted. Or, rather, his ancestor, Zircon Jim Laffer, who can be found reading a 'specialist' magazine in one of Coarsegold's outhouses. The sins of the fathers, etc.

» [PC] The designers had a bit of fun with a cameo by *King's Quest* favourite, Cedric The Owl.



Rumble Pak

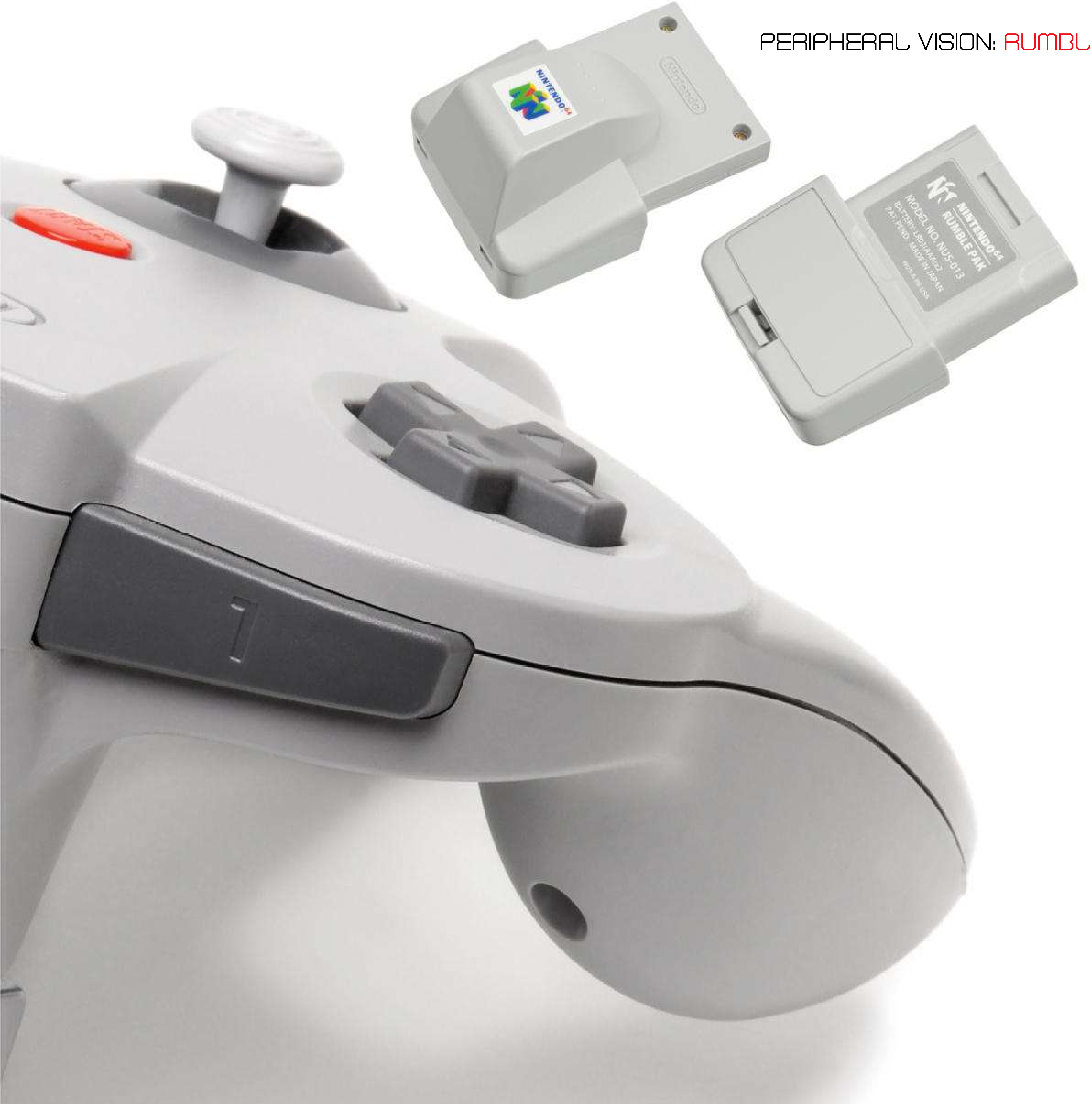
» PLATFORM: N64 **» RELEASED:** 1997
» COST: £12.99 (launch), £14+ (today, boxed) £6+ (today, unboxed)

It's not a pretty device, nor a particularly complex one, but the N64's Rumble Pak adds a nice little jolt of excitement to any game that supported it. The Rumble Pak is a fairly bland grey device that slots into the N64 controller's expansion port, and features a battery compartment for two AAA batteries. When a game with Rumble Pak support is being played, a signal can be sent to the device that causes the internal motor to start spinning, producing a vibration that can be felt by the player.

While it was an innovative device, arriving at the same time as Sony's first vibrating control pad in Japan, it does have some drawbacks. Apart from being battery powered, making it more expensive to keep running than would be preferable, it uses the only expansion port on the controller. This means a lot of swapping with Memory Paks in games that support both peripherals. Still, the impact of the peripheral is undeniable – pretty much every major controller since includes a vibration feature or support for adding one, and attempts by other manufacturers to ditch the function (such as with Sony's Sixaxis) have been met with scorn and derision. *

Rumble Pak fact

- As the original versions arrived before the Rumble Pak launched, Japanese players were treated to re-releases of *Super Mario 64* and *Wave Race 64*, featuring Rumble Pak support and minor bug fixes.


NINTENDO 64
Nintendo
NINTENDO 64
RUMBLE PAK
MODEL NO. NUS-013
MADE IN JAPAN

ESSENTIAL GAME

Star Fox 64

The Rumble Pak was originally released in a bundle with *Star Fox 64*, and it's easy to see why Nintendo chose this game to show off the device. When you can *feel* every crash into terrain and every hit from enemy fire – in short, all of the dangers that cause the Rumble Pak to kick into action – things just seem more urgent. Since you'll be experiencing such incidents quite frequently until you get the hang of the game, this is the right place to introduce it and showcase the level of immersion it can add to a game.

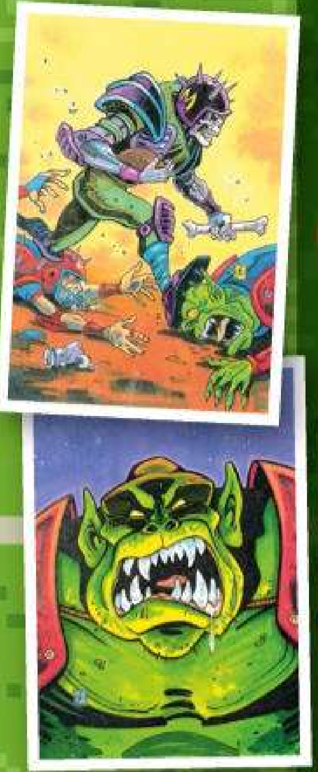
SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

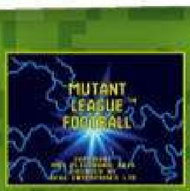
THE MAKING OF

MUTANT LEAGUE FOOTBALL

WHAT IF MADDEN NFL WAS FILLED WITH MUTANTS, MONSTERS AND A MENAGERIE OF BEASTS? MICHAEL MENDHEIM TELLS US THE STORY OF HOW HIS TWO PASSIONS RESULTED IN ONE OF EA'S MOST ORIGINAL BRANDS

WORDS BY ADAM BARNES





The story of Electronic Arts is a varied one, and the likes of classics from the Mega Drive era such as *Desert Strike* or *Road Rash* are generally what many gamers of a certain age will remember the publisher for. But for all its high-quality releases during the period, it was the sports division with games like *Madden*, *FIFA* and *NHL* that made the publisher and developer such a massive name in the industry. And so a game that was built to be a satire of those sports was always going to be a fun diversion to fit into its catalogue of games.

"This was very early in my career," recalls Michael Mendheim, the creator of *Mutant League Football*. "I had already done a couple of videogames so it wasn't my first design but it was something that I was kind of working on, on my own, in my own time." Michael adds that it was his love of both American football and monsters, mutants and violence that was the spark that this game came from. "I wanted to kind of merge those themes along with the postapocalypse and add humour and parody about politics and sports into a product." The initial work was just a "high-level overview document", but Michael was able to create some nice looking artwork to go alongside it since he was an illustrator and had worked in marketing previously. "One of my friends who I had done other products with was now at Electronic Arts and he was a senior-level producer there. But we were friends, and we hung out and one day over some beer, I bounced this idea to him and I showed him the comps. This had to be 1992. He liked the idea and when he saw the art and everything, he thought it was really cool."

This producer was Richard Robbins, who had been the champion of titles such as *Desert Strike* and *Crüe Ball* while he was at EA. "He told me to further develop it, which I did. I created more art, fleshed out the design more, and he set me up to go to EA to pitch the meeting."

The process, according to Michael, involved flying out to the headquarters in LA to attend one of the meetings that would be held at certain times of the month for producers to come in and

» [Mega Drive] The fact that *Mutant League Football* only released on Mega Drive is a testament to the American-centric audience the game was targeting.

IN THE KNOW

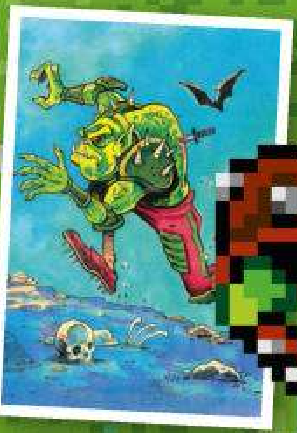
- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

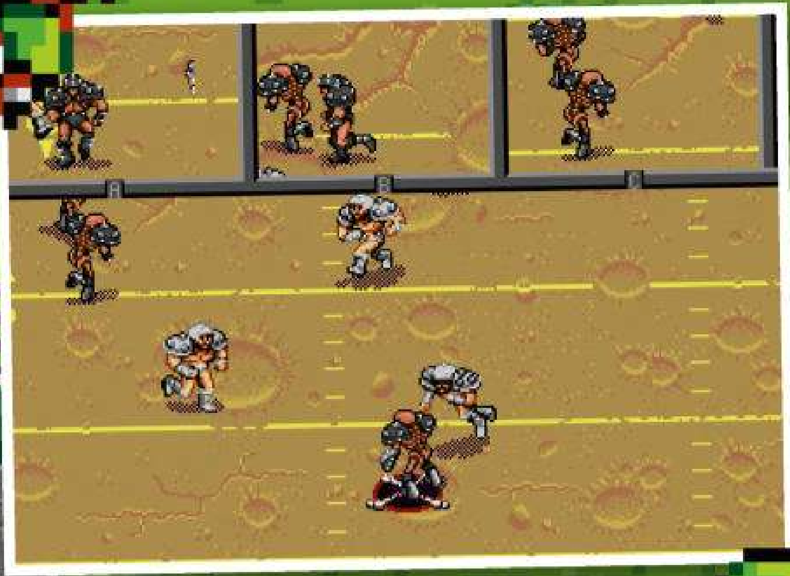
ROAD RASH
SYSTEM: AMIGA, MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM, GAME GEAR, GAME BOY
YEAR: 1991

DESERT STRIKE
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES
YEAR: 1992

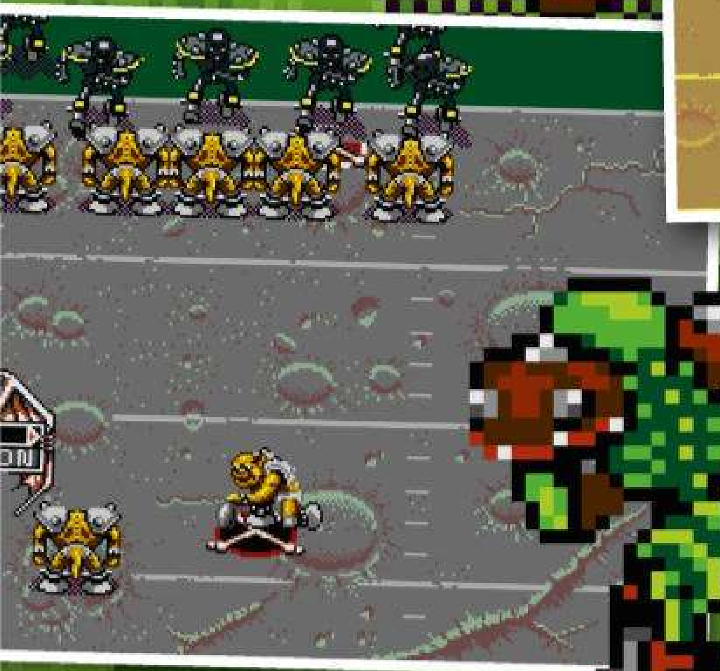
MUTANT LEAGUE HOCKEY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1994



The fun and cartoony art style separated it from the likes of *John Madden Football*, but *Mutant League Football* still retained a hardcore level of challenge.



[Mega Drive] The pass window only appears when pressing the pass button, meaning you have to think quickly to get the ball where you want it to go.

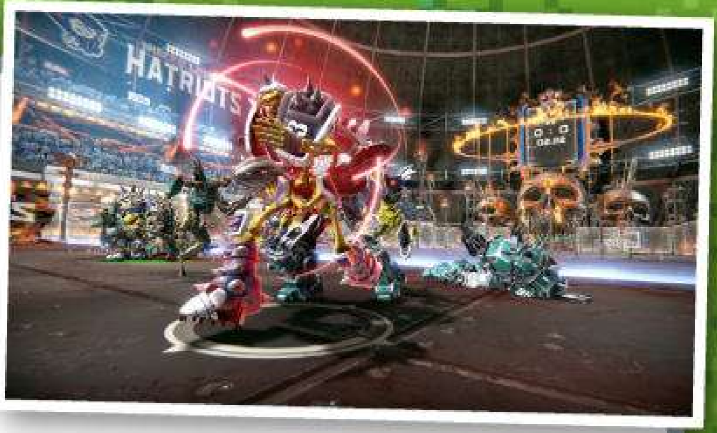


pitch products. All of EA's top brass would be at these meetings, including Trip Hawkins who was the CEO at the time. "So I went in there with my art and presentation, they had marketing and sales and Trip and all the producers and the guys who run product development. You get about 15-20 minutes to do your pitch. I had a design document that was passed around the table, I had the art." Michael adds that while it wasn't his first pitch, "It was the first that I *really* wanted to do and so the stakes were high." Luckily he had some advantages in this regard, on one side his previous work experience as an illustrator and on the other side his connection with Richard. "I knew that the most important thing about that pitch was that I needed good eye candy: you can do a pitch, but if you have imagery that you can use as support where people can just look at it without you saying too much and they get what you're trying to do, that's half the battle. So having a background in graphic design and advertising, that was hugely beneficial to me to construct a confident pitch."

But these meetings always raise some hairy questions for an external designer, and in that sense it was Richard's guidance that really helped to push the quirky combo of mutants and the NFL into approval. "When you're in that meeting you have a lot of really, really smart guys – far smarter than me – on the engineering side or the marketing side and they're going to ask you questions that you better have answers for. Being able to have Richard hone me on that [helped], and so even though I'm this little stupid creative guy coming in and pitching the idea, the producer is the guy who actually champions the product." In fact even in this early concept stage, Richard's experience as a producer helped to restrain Michael's overexcited ideas to add into the game, ultimately helping to make the pitch as successful as possible. "As I was developing my concepts, Richard was telling me, 'No, we can't do that, that's going to add four months to development. They're not going to put resources behind it if you are overambitious.'"

Unsurprisingly, the pitch for *Mutant League Football* was successful and Michael was set to work on progressing with the game's development. "I had a flat at EA and they had this crash pad, right? So whenever they flew in developers, you stayed in this god awful crash pad which has several bedrooms so there are different people." This meant that he could have access to the initially small team of two programmers and two artists. "It was basically: flesh out the design and we're going to put a little bit of resource behind it and see what you guys come up with," says Michael.

Though the core idea was to leverage the moment-to-moment gameplay of *Madden* with the added innovation of dirty tricks and violent ▶



A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

THE MODERN-DAY SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR FROM THE ORIGINAL CREATOR…

"I'd just been getting fan mail over the last 25 years," explains Michael on why he had decided to create a successor to his beloved *Mutant League Football*. "The number one question was always: will there be another *Mutant League Football*?" As luck would have it, the brand itself had been discarded by EA, and the publisher even decided to abandon the trademark. "They had no intention of ever doing another *Mutant League* sports game," says Michael, "so I thought, 'You know what, maybe if we picked it up – I changed the name slightly – maybe there would be interest.'"

The first step was, like so many games at the time, Kickstarter. However, while the best of intentions to create a true spiritual successor were there, Michael's initial Kickstarter struggled to get off the ground, something he attributes to a lack of trust that he and his team could get this done. When the second Kickstarter came around – this time with a playable demo – the goal was reached within days. "We actually hit our goal on Kickstarter during the Super Bowl when Tom Brady came back and beat the Atlanta Falcons."

According to Michael, the team wanted to make something different to the original, but still something that retained "the heart and soul of what people loved about it". Primarily this means the quirky monster design, the humour and the violent version of the United States' most beloved sport.

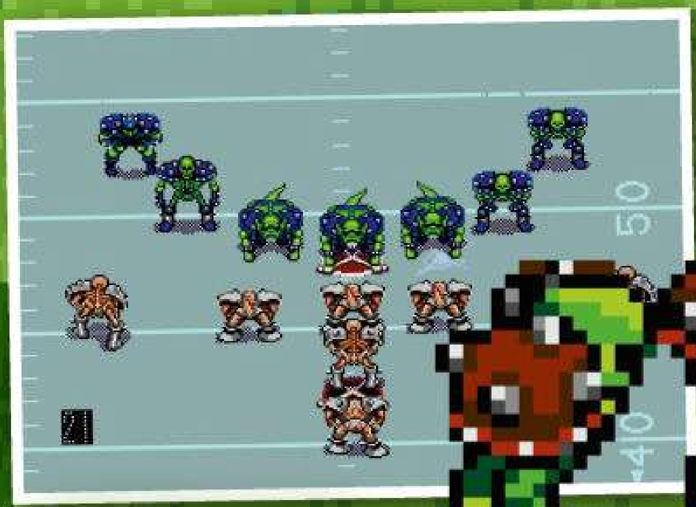
The humour in particular has been scaled up thanks to the extra budget, and was one of the things that players loved the most when it was released in 2017/2018 for PC, PS4, Xbox One and Switch. "Once you actually have an announcer and good comedic writers, you can add a lot more humour," says Michael.

ways to alter the trajectory of a match, *Mutant League Football* actually didn't use the *Madden* engine as its foundation. "A lot of people think we just changed the characters and used the *Madden* engine, but it wasn't that," explains Michael, adding that EA didn't want the engine to be repurposed and so instead the programmers created their own. "But the *Madden* guys would give us a lot of input and feedback on our game, and the one thing that they kept saying to me was, 'Make it different to football.' I think they would have preferred, and perhaps the title would have even been more successful, had I moved it further away from football than it was."

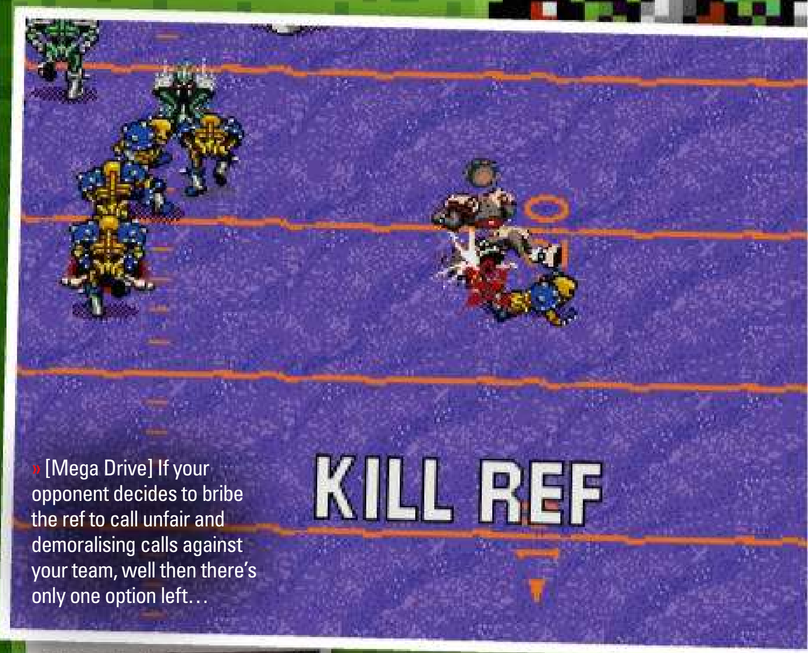
The big difference of course was its setting, and though the rules of the sport were still held in place by Michael, it opened up numerous ways to adapt the sport for comedic, violent or fun means. The humour was a pastiche of its time, satirising the state of the then-modern sports and the familiar faces within it. The most iconic example of this is Bones Jackson, a fairly on-the-nose reference to famous American superstar Bo Jackson but with a ghoulish twist. The whole game was like this, with Michael's love of the NFL filling the game with nods to contemporary sportspeople, subtle or otherwise, that was ultimately one of the things that people loved about *Mutant League Football*. "Most of the humour, like all good humour, was based on reality," explains Michael. "So our humour was playing off of player egos, and contracts and how much money they make. Or the differences in the coaches. So one of our teams was based on the Chicago Bears and at that time they had Mike Ditka coaching them, so we had a troll that put the hat on and he'd just get angry at you and when he reaches a certain amount of anger his head just explodes. It's humour that's just childish: like a fart, a fart is always funny." And indeed, orcs standing on the line of scrimmage letting one rip was also something that was put into the game. "It's a mix of satirising the league, and then just childish humour thrown in that just kicks people's minds back to when they were younger."

This irreverent tone ultimately had a knock-on effect to the game's design, too. When you had monsters and mutants capable of decapitating the opposition, the typical rules of NFL could be altered and tweaked for a hugely novel new approach. It helped that the real sport offered a bounty of opportunities for fun twists, too. "There were just some things about football that piss me off," laughs Michael, adding that certain parts of the design were formed from his own interactions with the sport. "The whole 'kill ref' and 'bribe ref' thing," he explains by way of an example, "came from me watching football games when I'd be like, 'That ref is bribed!' So me as a football fanatic, stuff like that I wanted in the game. Those ideas, that's where they came about."

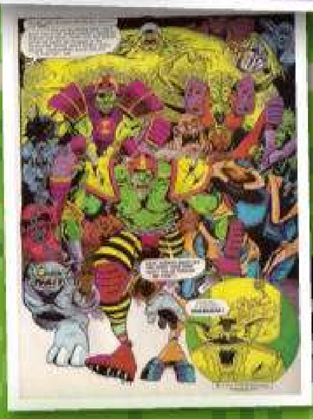
The majority of the game's production rolled on like this, with Michael working as a contractor and a designer, however as *Mutant League Football* began to get closer to its end date, it started to receive a good deal of attention internally. As people started to play it and have fun with it, more and more attention started to be placed on the game and, with it, Michael. "Once EA started paying attention, they realised I was a contractor and that we didn't have a producer," explains Michael. "So they brought in a new guy, Sam Nelson who, like Richard, is a very talented producer. I obviously immediately fly out there to meet him and at first it was just oil and water. I didn't want this guy coming in, what's he gonna do? Now he's gonna fuck with my project? We initially clashed, but Sam had many years in the industry, just a track record of success. Him coming into the



» [Mega Drive] Just your casual line-up of walking skeletons facing off against lizard-like aliens. Totally normal.



» [Mega Drive] If your opponent decides to bribe the ref to call unfair and demoralising calls against your team, well then there's only one option left…



» Thanks in part to the animated TV show, *Mutant League Football*'s brand awareness reached surprisingly eclectic levels – including a run of comics.

THE TEAM WORKS

MEET THE MOST NOTABLE SQUADS

WAR SLAMMERS

It'll be tough for most opponents to score much against the War Slammers. Their defence is one of the strongest in the game, and with some great running backs and a solid quarterback in Warhog, they're also no slouches when it comes to scoring points themselves.

DARKSTAR DRAGONS

If you prefer plays that involve lobbing the ball around the field, then this team is likely your best option with perhaps the best passing capabilities in the game. With all-star quarterback Joe Magician (that's Joe Montana), the Dragons are a solid pick for any inexperienced player.

ICEBAY BASHERS

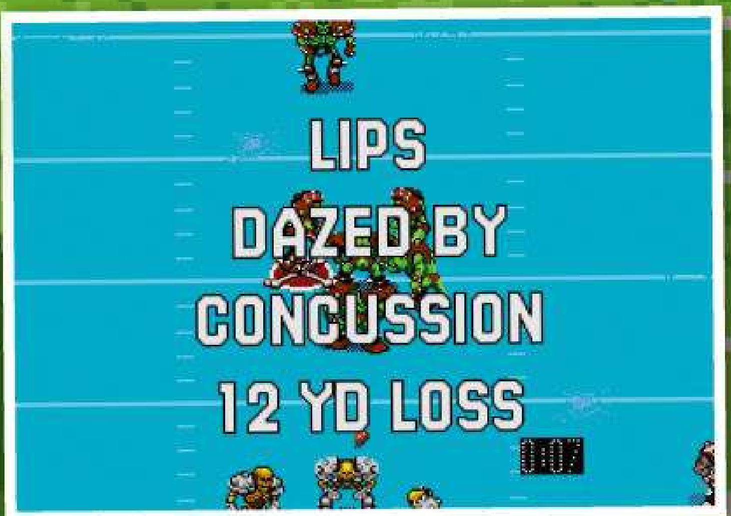
The Green Bay Packers don't get much preferential treatment with their analog in *Mutant League Football*, since there are a lot of flaws in their team members and therefore the types of plays that are typically open to them. Still, at least there's no cheese-heads annoying everyone in the crowd.

MIDWAY MONSTERS

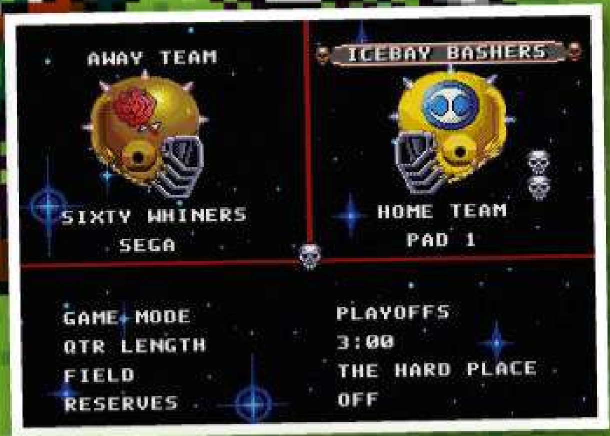
Bones Jackson is a pretty iconic character in *Mutant League Football*, and their name is a reference to world-famous sportsperson Bo Jackson. As one of the best players in the game and a solid RB to boot, Midway Monsters ends up as the best non-all-star team in the game.

SLAYCITY SLAYERS

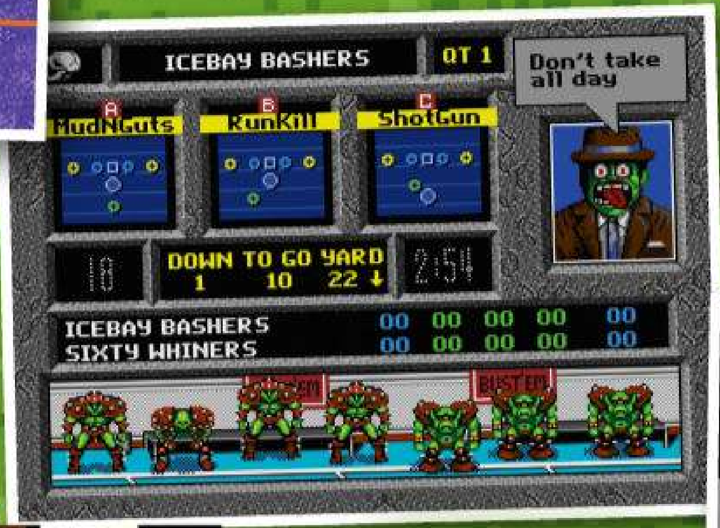
The Slayers' strengths in defence rather than offence is ultimately what sets them behind the Midway Monsters as the best team, but the team leader K T Slayer (a reference to famed New York Giants player Lawrence Taylor) has the highest stats of any player in the game.


LIPS
DAZED BY
CONCUSSION
12 YD LOSS
1:07

» [Mega Drive] The commentary that would pop up to inform you of what happened can lead to some… interesting results.


AWAY TEAM
ICEBAY BASHERS
SIXTY WHINERS
SEGA
HOME TEAM
PAD 1
GAME MODE PLAYOFFS
QTR LENGTH 3:00
FIELD THE HARD PLACE
RESERVES OFF

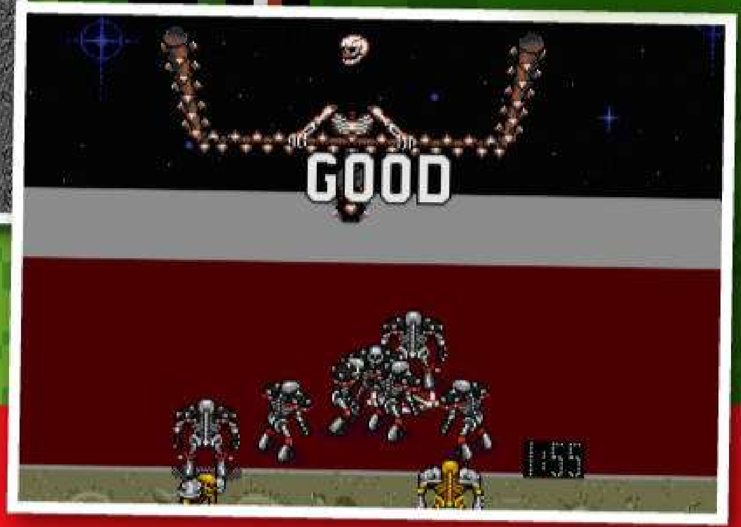
» [Mega Drive] The references to American football was one of the aspects of the game's humour that those in the know really enjoyed.


ICEBAY BASHERS
QT 1
Don't take all day
A MudNGuts
B RunKill
C ShotGun
18
DOWN TO GO YARD
1 10 22
2:51
ICEBAY BASHERS 00 00 00 00 00
SIXTY WHINERS 00 00 00 00 00

» [Mega Drive] Each play starts by picking the manoeuvres you want to take, just watch you don't frustrate your coach too much or his head might explode. Literally.

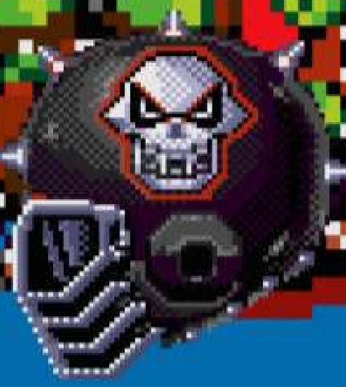
project got us additional resources." On top of that, Sam's expertise helped to keep the game on track while knowing how to handle what a game needs in terms of making, production and overall design. "Within those final three or four months of development, I learned an incredible amount of insight from Sam," admits Michael.

And yet while there was a great deal of excitement around *Mutant League Football* internally within EA, there were still a lot of doubts surrounding its potential. Michael explains that the team thought "we had a little bit of magic" and everyone was optimistic, but early tests had left everyone worrying about how it might be perceived. "I think the initial focus tests were a little mixed because you had people who didn't know what to expect, because they were expecting *Madden* but there were these little crazy monsters." However, by the time it was released in 1993 on Mega Drive, the eye-catching art for the marketing, positive reviews and a good deal of word of mouth did enough to put the spotlight on *Mutant League Football*.


GOOD
1:55

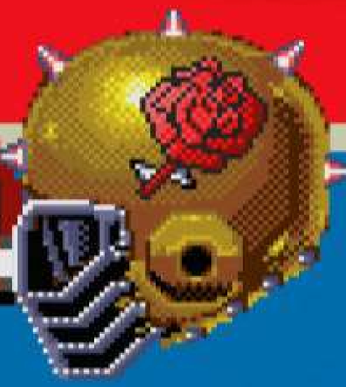
» [Mega Drive] Bet you never saw John Madden punting a pigskin between a skeleton post and out into the depths of space.

"Once the product was released, we started getting really good reviews and people were loving it," says Michael. "The whole thing just picked up like a snowball going down a mountain and EA put a really good campaign behind it, and at that point they were really believing in the product." So much so, in fact, that EA went very strong on the brand, not only deciding to make other games with the name – *Mutant League Hockey* being the most notable – but pushing it into unexpected and uncharted territory. The brand was given the works, covering pretty much everything from comic books and an animated TV series to collectable cards and action figures. It was only fitting that one of the quirkiest releases from EA during the period should be met with such quirky brand spin-offs. It was so prevalent that fans of the game (primarily in America, of course) were enamoured, and still have a soft spot for the game even all these years later. It might not have been as original as *Desert Strike* or been as successful as *Madden*, but the comedy and compelling gameplay that *Mutant League Football* offers still remains compulsive to this day. That's testament to a game that modern-day EA would likely never consider. ✱



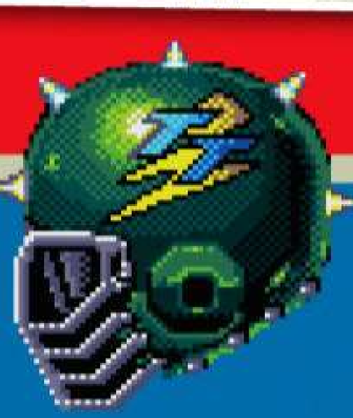
DEATHSKIN RAZORS

With possibly the best quarterback in the game in Snake, this skeleton crew (literally – they're all animated bones) is a strong team to consider. A pretty decent defence means you don't need to worry too much about opposition slipping through.



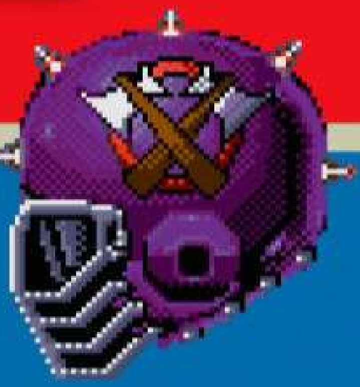
SIXTY WHINERS

The tongue-in-cheek reference here must be pretty clear for all, even those who aren't familiar with the NFL. That might suggest there's something of a developer bias coming in here, then, since the San Francisco 49ers' equivalent in the game is easily one of the worst.



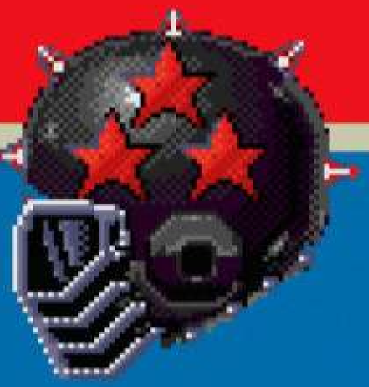
TURBO TECHIES

This team of robot sports stars might seem daunting considering the violence necessary to inflict in *Mutant League Football*, but actually they're pretty much mid-table when compared to many others of this list. The team is by no means bad, and has somewhat humorous audibles.



VILE VULGARS

Playing as the Vile Vulgars is the same as playing on Extra Hard. Unless you're very skilled at the game, this is a team that won't be winning any medals. It does have the accolade for the worst stats in a team, so that's something – it's not a good something but there you go.



GALAXY ACES

There are three all-star teams available, each related to the playoffs that their players come from. The Galaxy Aces has all of the best players in the game, however, making them easily the best team to play if you're looking for an easy win. That's our pick, right there, yup!

Metal Slug X

WAR HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN

» PlayStation » 2001 » SNK

For me, 2003 was the year that retro gaming became an active choice, rather than just a side effect of growing up poor. It was the year that I first put together a complete list of my collection, and the year of my first eBay purchases (*Ecco The Dolphin* for Mega-CD and *NiGHTS Into Dreams* on the Saturn). It was also the year when I started to feel a tad disillusioned with modern gaming for the first time. I just wasn't into military shooters that took themselves very seriously, nor the general consensus that games had to become more 'mature' to succeed. Meanwhile, hand-holding and forced tutorials were sucking the fun of experimentation and discovery out of gaming.

When I first saw *Metal Slug X* on the shop shelves, it seemed to be an antidote to all of that. I was vaguely aware that *Metal Slug* was supposed to be good anyway, and everything about it appealed to me. Sure, it was another game depicting war, but the fact that it was an arcade conversion suggested instantly enjoyable pick-up-and-play action. There was no glossy realistic 3D, just nicely drawn and frequently hilarious 2D animation. It stood out from the crowd, and I left the shop with a shiny new copy of the game. Playing it with my friend James confirmed that it was everything I'd wanted it to be – we laughed a lot and had a great time, even though we didn't complete the game. It wasn't particularly old, and yet felt a world away from modern trends.

I no longer have that copy of *Metal Slug X* – but that's only because I loved the game so much that I picked up a Neo Geo MVS cartridge, so that I could have the full 60Hz experience with perfect animation. *Metal Slug X* came into my life at exactly the right time to remind me of how much fun games could be, and as much as I love the other games in the series, this one will always hold a special place in my heart because of that. ✱

THE MAKING OF

FIFA 95 SOCCER

FOLLOWING THE WORLDWIDE SUCCESS OF FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER, A SEQUEL WAS SOON IN THE WORKS. AIMED EXCLUSIVELY AT THE SEGA MEGA DRIVE CONSOLE, FIFA SOCCER 95 IS THE GAME THAT CEMENTED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE SPORTING BEHEMOTH THAT WE KNOW AND LOVE TODAY. RETRO GAMER SPEAKS TO KEY MEMBERS OF ITS DEVELOPMENT TEAM TO FIND OUT MORE. IT'S IN THE GAME!

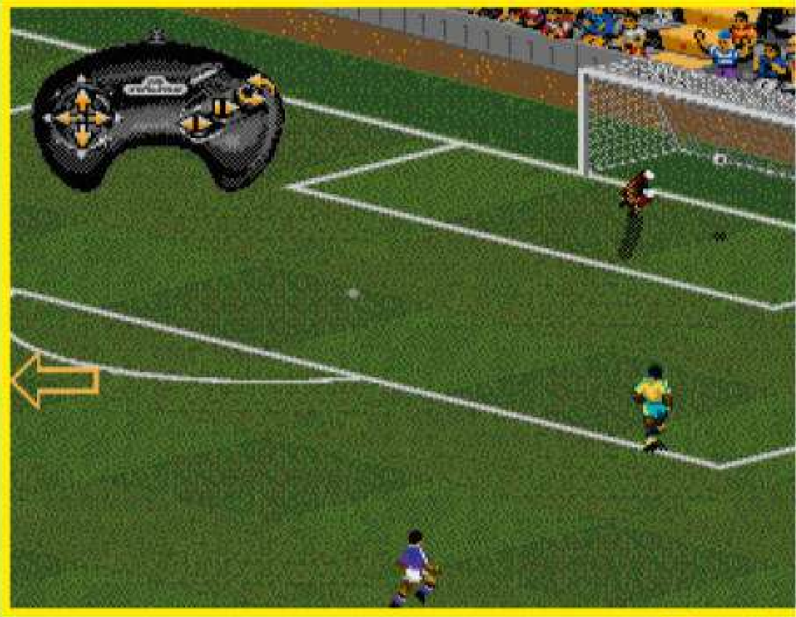
WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

Released in 1993, _FIFA International Soccer_'s breakout success gave publisher Electronic Arts a hit to rival its existing _John Madden_ series. Featuring an isometric display that brought football into a new dimension after years of top-down or side-on simulations, it was a game that divided fans with its superb graphics offset by a feeling that the player wasn't always totally in control of on-field events. "We knew early on in *FIFA International Soccer* that we had a strong product on our hands," says Bruce McMillan, producer on that game and its sequel, *FIFA Soccer 95* (hereafter *FIFA 95*). Yes, even at this stage, the desire to facilitate a franchise and not a one-off game was strong. "Joey [Della-Savia, development director] and I organised the team in a manner to not only accomplish a great sequel but also the base and structure that would become the *FIFA* franchise," continues Bruce. *FIFA 95* would be the first step, together with the inclusion of club sides, omitted from *FIFA International Soccer* in order to get that game out in time for the arrival of the 1994 World Cup. "The core [development] team remained essentially the same from *FIFA*," says Bruce, "and we added people to support the additional features set and tuning to get ready for *FIFA 96*. *FIFA 95* was all about creating the best soccer game on the Mega Drive."

Working on the series once more was programmer Brian Plank, and he could see another game was inevitable. "We saw an immediate positive response to *FIFA* when it was released," remembers Brian. "It was created in about six months, an intense level of effort from a small core team. This meant that while we were able to produce the game, there were a lot of areas that could be improved upon." For Brian, his primary influences were not other football videogames, but Electronic Arts' *NHL Hockey* and arcade games such as *Zaxxon*, and the former would eventually become more intrinsic to *FIFA 95*, lending its passing template to the soccer game.

As with most videogame sports simulations, the equilibrium between realism and playability is a central factor. "A challenge was how to balance between the game being realistic versus making the passing super-responsive and work well in the game," admits Brian. Even within the team there were different opinions on where this balance should lie. As a fan of classic arcade games, Brian leaned in favour of the twitch-style gameplay that ultimately won out. "On *FIFA 95*, we pushed towards making the game more responsive at the cost of realism. We had some mixed press, some thought we might have pushed it too far, but others liked it." Taking note of the precise passing of Electronic Arts' ice hockey simulations, Brian and his coding partners began infusing *FIFA 95* with greater fidelity in man-to-man passing making it immensely easier to string together a series of passes.

Along with new playable teams, competitions and gameplay options, an improvement in *FIFA 95*'s graphics was vital in order to give fans a feeling of visible progression. In charge of art was David Adams, and he recalls the reaction to *FIFA International Soccer* at Extended Play. "There was a lot of excitement within the studio following its release. We were all keen to show them our best and Bruce and Joey could see the vision of this becoming a huge franchise. As a team, we could all feel it!" For David, the key change from the original game was the player graphics. New moves and smoother animations, mainly thanks to Dianna Davies, building on the work by George Ashcroft in the first game, were perhaps the most noticeable, along with improvements and a reworking of all screen visuals, from the UI to grass texture. "We endeavoured to create a more broadcast-style presentation of all the gameplay elements, designed and inspired by the broadcast styles of the day," explains David. Dianna Davies, as lead animator, was perfect for her role given she was one of the few members of the team that actually played soccer. "It was ▶



» [Mega Drive] The action replay ability was back and refined, making it easy to recapture those moments of glory… or disaster.

IN THE KNOW

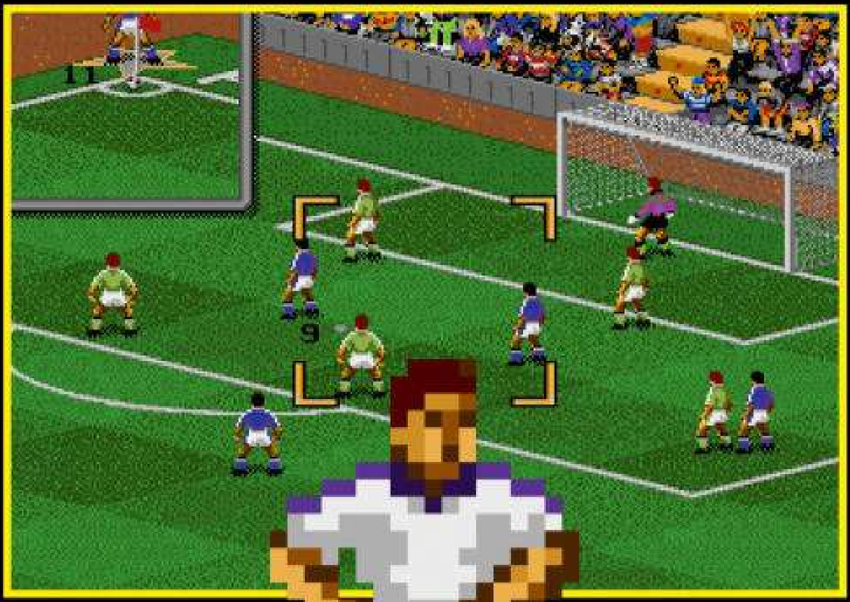
» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** EXTENDED PLAY PRODUCTIONS

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE

» **GENRE:** SPORTS



» [Mega Drive] Taking a corner is intuitive – point the box where you want the ball to go and kick.

> "FIFA 95 WAS ALL ABOUT CREATING THE BEST SOCCER GAME ON THE MEGA DRIVE"
>
> **BRUCE MCMILLAN**

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1993

FIFA SOCCER 96 (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1995

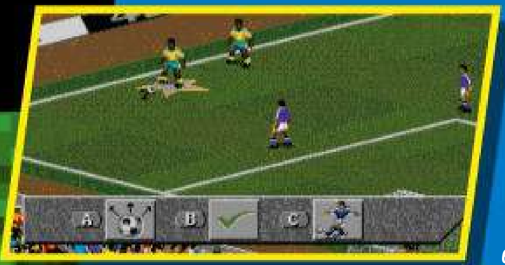
FIFA SOCCER 97
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1995

ENHANCING THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

HOW FIFA 95 IMPROVES UPON THE ORIGINAL

ANIMATION

Extended Play's art department worked hard to improve upon the player animations of the previous game. Now more fluid and focused, there are extra animations for heading and volleying as well as random encouragement and goal celebrations. Also upgraded are the pitch graphics and the TV-style goal salutes.

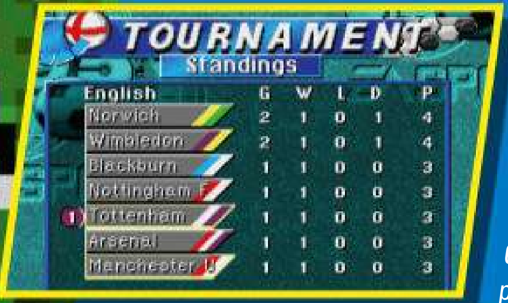


FREE KICKS

FIFA 95 gives players a larger range of options upon receiving a direct free kick in their favour. Now, they can cycle through a variety of options of passing to colleagues by pressing A or simply take a shot should the opponent's goal be close enough with the C button.

HEADERS

Headers were random and inconsequential in FIFA International Soccer. In FIFA 95 they become an effective weapon, either when clearing the ball out of defence or when trying to score. Pressing different directions on the d-pad affects the type of header and its direction with glancing and looping variations possible.



TOURNAMENT
Standings

English	G	W	L	D	P
Norwich	2	1	0	1	4
Wimbledon	2	1	0	1	4
Blackburn	1	1	0	0	3
Nottingham	1	1	0	0	3
Tottenham	1	1	0	0	3
Arsenal	1	1	0	0	3
Manchester U	1	1	0	0	3

NEW CLUBS AND COMPETITIONS

Held over in order to avoid delaying the original game, a huge range of clubs both European and worldwide arrived for FIFA 95 along with their respective leagues. Now you can finally pitch Queens Park Rangers up against Mexico or take part in a whole season's worth of footie action.

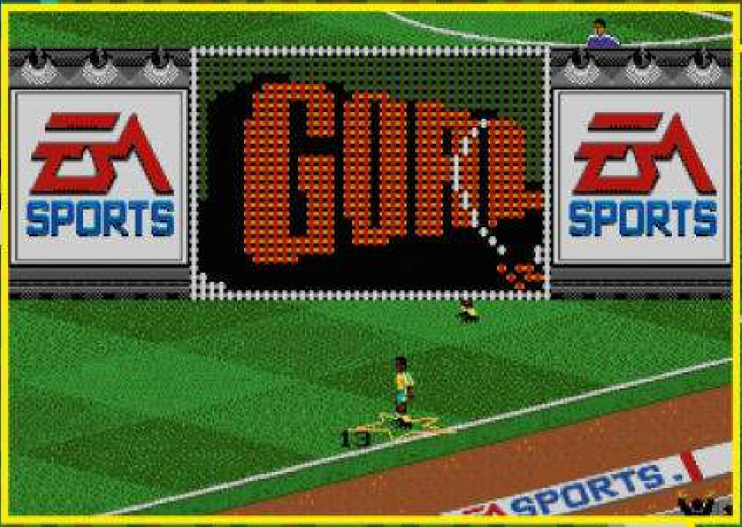
GREATER PASSING CONTROL

Together with the somewhat slippery player control of the first game, passing was also imprecise, making it difficult to string together a decent move and leaving players often resorting to a boot up-field. FIFA 95 goes a long way to addressing both these issues, paving the way for the sleek system today.

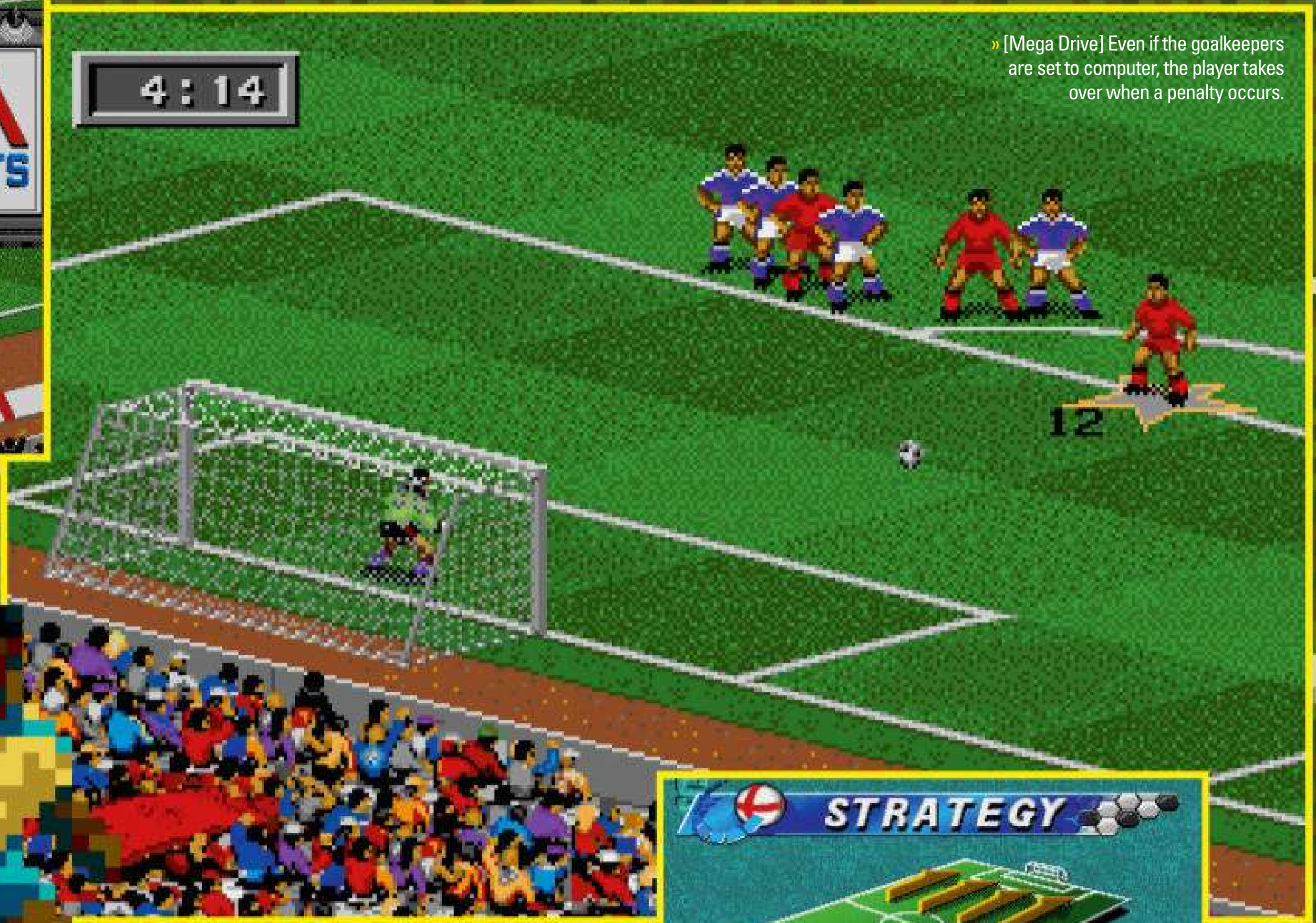
Italy
6. M. Bianchi

DREADED PENALTY SHOOT OUT

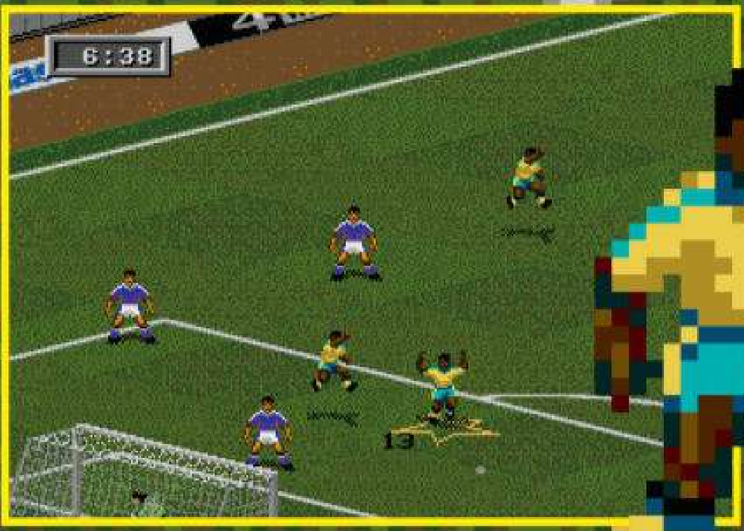
In FIFA International Soccer, tied matches went to extra time then sudden death – which could mean a very long game! FIFA 95 moves sudden death into extra time and if there are no goals in this period then a penalty shoot out takes place. Computer goalie or not, the player takes control of their goalkeeper and penalty takers.



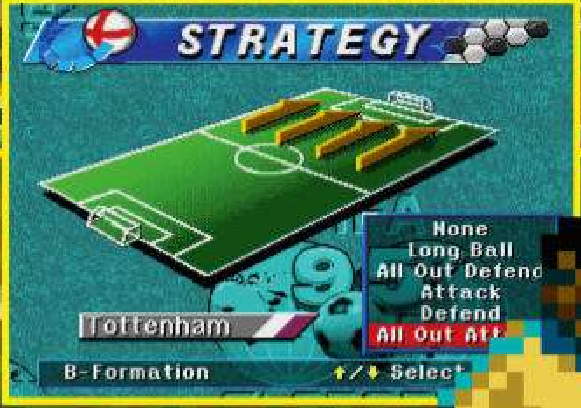
» [Mega Drive] The crazy goal graphics are back along with the ability to add some sound effects to accompany them.



» [Mega Drive] Even if the goalkeepers are set to computer, the player takes over when a penalty occurs.

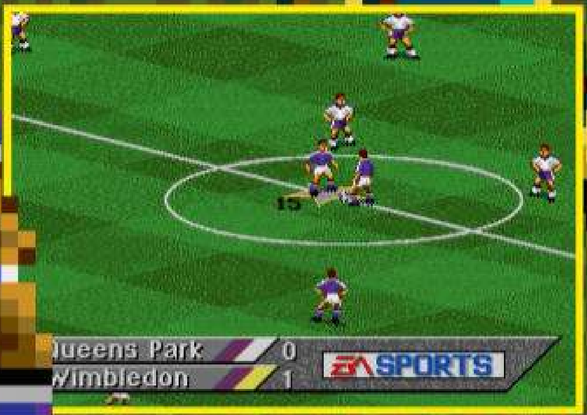


» [Mega Drive] Score a goal and the scorer goes on a manic celebration.



» [Mega Drive] Tactics can be set that measure how the players react and move on the pitch, as well as their formation.

> **"A CHALLENGE WAS HOW TO BALANCE BETWEEN THE GAME BEING REALISTIC VERSUS MAKING THE PASSING SUPER-RESPONSIVE AND WORK WELL IN THE GAME"**
>
> **BRIAN PLANK**



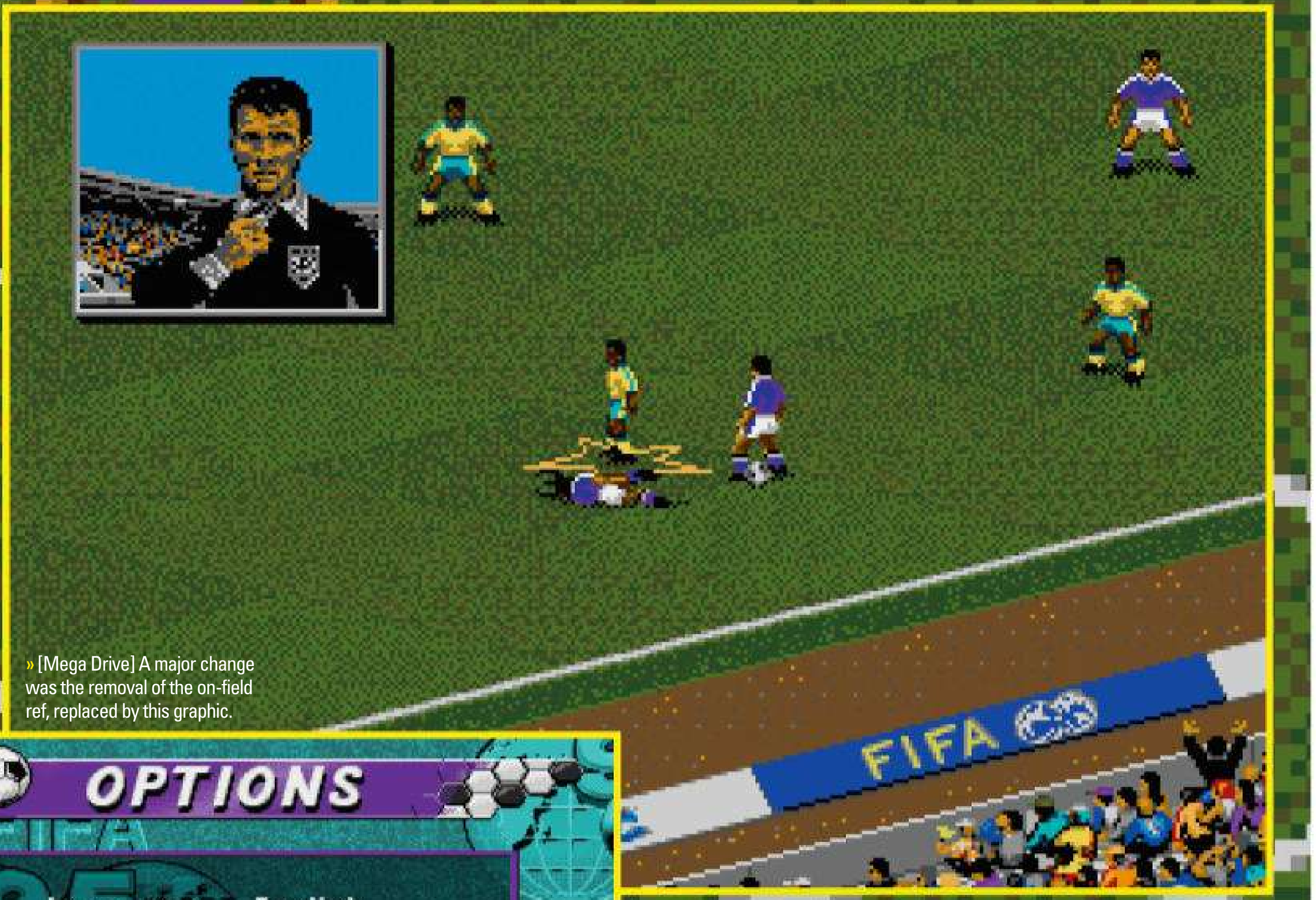
» [Mega Drive] QPR are already behind in this very Nineties London derby.

always amusing watching an animator [such as Dianna] at work," says David. "They would often stand up from their desks and play out the moves over and over to get the nuances in their head just right, then sit down to tweak the move on the screen." In the days before bespoke motion-capture software and studios dedicated to the art, animators like Dianna used their own bodies to recreate the animations you see in-game.

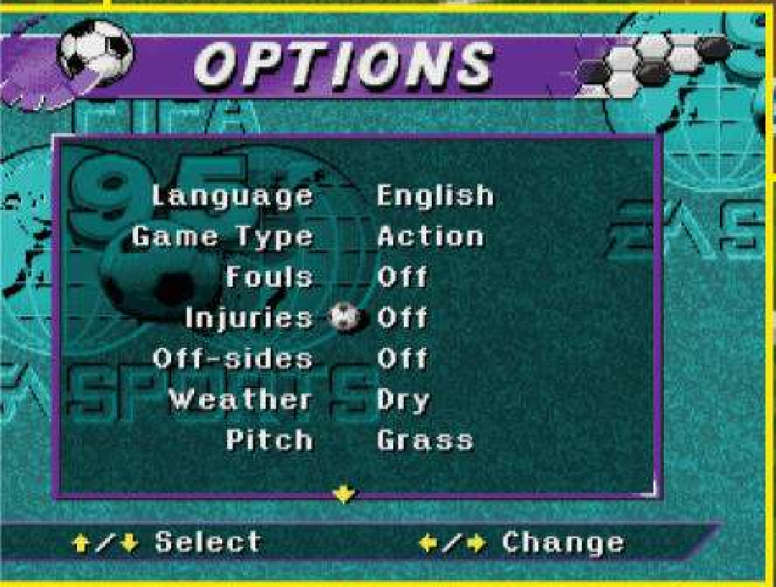
Despite *FIFA 95* being only the second game in what its publisher and designers hoped would be a long-term franchise, there was still considerable time pressure on Extended Play. Fortunately, Brian Plank's gargantuan efforts on the first game assisted here, giving *FIFA 95* a solid platform that simply required building upon. Having realised that the Sega Mega Drive's C++ compiler wasn't good enough for his purposes, Brian had taken on the task of porting the code base for the original *FIFA* from a powerful PC in C++ to the relatively weak Mega Drive in C. "A side benefit of this work was that the resulting code was very portable C," notes Brian. "Also, because it was done by one person – me – the code had a clean, consistent style that made it easy to understand and work with." The legacy of Brian's efforts is that the original game was easy to port, and the team could focus its efforts on fresh gameplay elements and smarter graphics.

In addition to the extra leagues and cup competitions, *FIFA 95* would iron out some of the issues that had bugged *FIFA International Soccer*, as well as eradicating unnecessary elements. Gone was the on-field referee – impish players could no longer constantly run away from the man in black when a card was imminent – to be replaced with a simple memory-saving graphical image whenever an incident occurred. Also absent was the ability of human players to intercept a goalkeeper's goal kick by jumping in front of them before passing into an empty net. "[The team] playtested the game and monitored all reviews and customer feedback and when we became aware of bugs that negatively impacted gameplay, we fixed them," says Brian. "Just like in the real game, keepers receive a lot of attention and everyone notices when they mess up. Everybody remembers a bug in the goalkeeper that affects the outcome of a game!" Also gone were superfluous in-game items such as the coin toss to decide which team would kick off and the ability to choose which half to play.

But perhaps the most crucial element in terms of gameplay was the ball control and player AI. Having received criticism for a lack of control in *FIFA International Soccer*, the team developed an improved passing system that made the process much clearer and precise. Footballers not under direct control now hovered, waiting to be controlled and used as the player saw fit. As well as improved passing, the player could now dribble better by constantly tapping pass, and volleys were introduced. That critical part of football, heading, was also refined, giving the player a greater level of control and a vital new avenue of scoring that had been curiously absent from the original. Yet despite the refinements and additions, the arcade origins of *FIFA* were not forgotten. As any veteran player of the early games will attest, the ability to swerve the ball post-touch made spectacular long-range shots much more likely to hit the back of the onion bag, though reproducing a similar result close up was much harder. "Over time, skilled players discovered the high-odds



» [Mega Drive] A major change was the removal of the on-field ref, replaced by this graphic.



Language English
Game Type Action
Fouls Off
Injuries Off
Off-sides Off
Weather Dry
Pitch Grass
↑/↓ Select ←/→ Change

» [Mega Drive] There's a decent range of options that alter the realism.

> **"IF YOU DO SOMETHING WELL ONCE, ONE CAN QUESTION IF YOU GOT LUCKY. IF YOU FOLLOW UP AND YOU DO IT A SECOND TIME, EVENTUALLY ONE HAS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT WASN'T LUCK"**
> **BRIAN PLANK**

long-range shots that we initially didn't discover in testing," notes Brian. "Nothing beats real-world testing by millions of people! If the game was released today, we could have released a patch, but back then there was no patching." Nonetheless, the result was an ability to score some remarkably exciting goals, hardly a major cause of complaint for fans.

FIFA 95 took two months longer than its predecessor to develop, a leisurely pace with a larger team, and it would have been even quicker had tragedy not struck midway through. Having become a key member of the Extended Play team during both *FIFA International Soccer* and its follow-up, development director Joey Della-Savia was tragically killed in a car crash on his way to work one morning. He was just 34 years old. "When Joey died so suddenly, it was a huge shock to everyone on the team," frowns Brian. "Literally one day he was there and the next he wasn't." Without its development director, a role which encompassed day-to-day management and keeping the project moving constantly, production on *FIFA 95* temporarily stalled. "Nothing was the same within the team," admits Brian. "Our productivity dropped to zero, and I wasn't even sure I was going to continue. But we persisted without our leader and friend, and made the best game we could to honour his legacy." As befits Joey's important role in bringing the *FIFA* franchise to life, *FIFA 95* is dedicated to his memory. "Sadly missed and never forgotten, Joey had a massive and lasting impression on the *FIFA* franchise and the team that created it," notes Bruce.

While today it may seem little more than a stepping stone in the annual event that has become *FIFA*, the success of this peculiarly Mega Drive exclusive second game cannot be overstated. "As is probably well known by now, we didn't have much support within Electronic Arts when we created the first game," says Brian. "When we finished it, we were proud of our work and felt it was a good game… but we didn't know how the market would receive it." After *FIFA International Soccer* became a smash, Electronic Arts quickly passed word that a sequel would be required. Continues Brian, "If you do something well once, one can question if you got lucky. If you follow up and you do it a second time, eventually one has to acknowledge that it wasn't luck."

One year later, Electronic Arts released *FIFA 96*, dispersing the series to several other platforms in the process. Incremental changes to the game didn't harm sales, thus setting the pattern for a multi-platform proven money-spinner. But it was with the 1995 game where it all truly began. "By the time we started development [on *FIFA 95*], we knew we had a hit on our hands and potentially a very important worldwide franchise," concludes Bruce. "The team and many others inside and outside EA made the franchise what it is today." ✱

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

MORE MEGA DRIVE EXCLUSIVE FOOTIE GAMES TO DISCOVER

EUROPEAN CLUB SOCCER

MEGA DRIVE
European Club Soccer

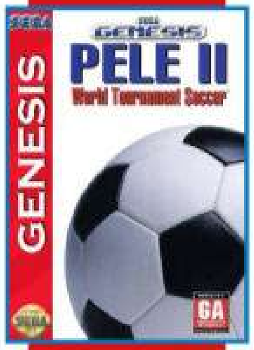
Also known as *World Trophy Soccer* (US) and *J-League Champion Soccer* (Japan), this 1992 game utilises the common side-on view first popularised in the Commodore 64's *International Soccer* from almost ten years earlier. Curiously, the game only uses two buttons, for ground and lobbed pass, with holding down the button making the pass quicker.

PELÉ

MEGA DRIVE
Pelé

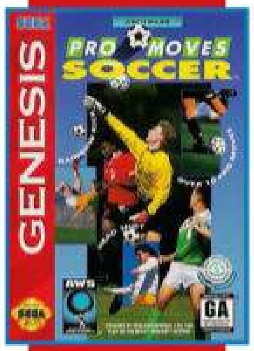
Following the success of *FIFA International Soccer*, rival isometric football games inevitably began to appear. This Accolade-produced game, featuring the official endorsement of one of football's most famous names, spectacularly fails with its arthritic players and awkward controls. Some fancy digitised pictures and presentation doesn't really help.

PELÉ II: WORLD TOURNAMENT SOCCER



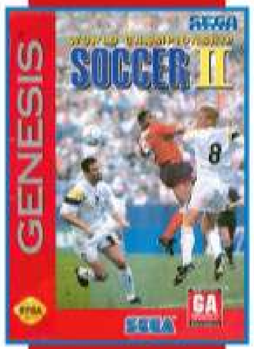
Things don't improve greatly for the second Mega Drive exclusive *Pelé* game, released the same year as Electronic Arts' second *FIFA*. Featuring a graphical overhaul, the absence of any effective crowd simulation engenders an eerie atmosphere that lacks all the pizazz of *FIFA*, and indeed the real game itself.

PRO MOVES SOCCER



An odd name, and an odd game, with the squat footballers hurling themselves around the quasi-top-down pitch. There are plenty of nice features – being able to edit the teams is a bonus – but at the end of the day it's all about what you do on the pitch, Brian, and simply put, *Pro Moves Soccer* just doesn't compare to *FIFA*.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SOCCER 2



Released in 1994, this game echoed *FIFA 95* in that it was the sequel to a multi-format forebear. As you'd expect given it's from the people behind *Sensible Soccer*, it has playability in spades, although there's a notable lack of options compared to what was fast becoming the leader in the pack, *FIFA*.

Gizmondo

» **MANUFACTURER:** Tiger Telematics » **YEAR:** 2005
» **COST:** £229.99 (launch), £175+ (today, boxed), £100+ (today, unboxed)

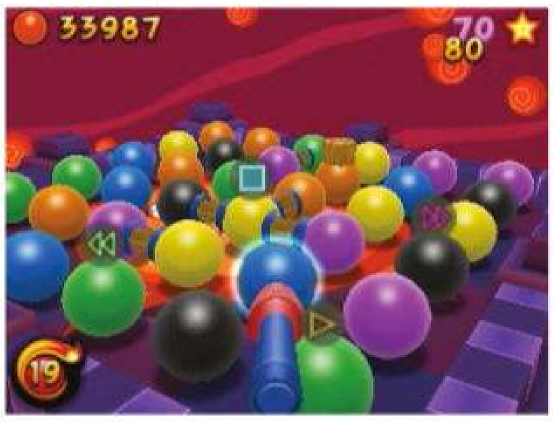
When it was originally conceptualised as the Gametrac, the Gizmondo was designed to fulfil two specific needs. Firstly, it would act as a child-tracking device, by way of its integrated GPS technology. Secondly, in order to ensure that kids would be willing to carry it, it would have gaming capabilities. As development rolled on, the feature set came to resemble a modern mobile device – it had a camera, it could send text messages, it was even supposed to have an online app store. Add a nice looking case from Rick Dickinson, the former Sinclair industrial designer, and you've got the makings of a potentially competitive handheld.

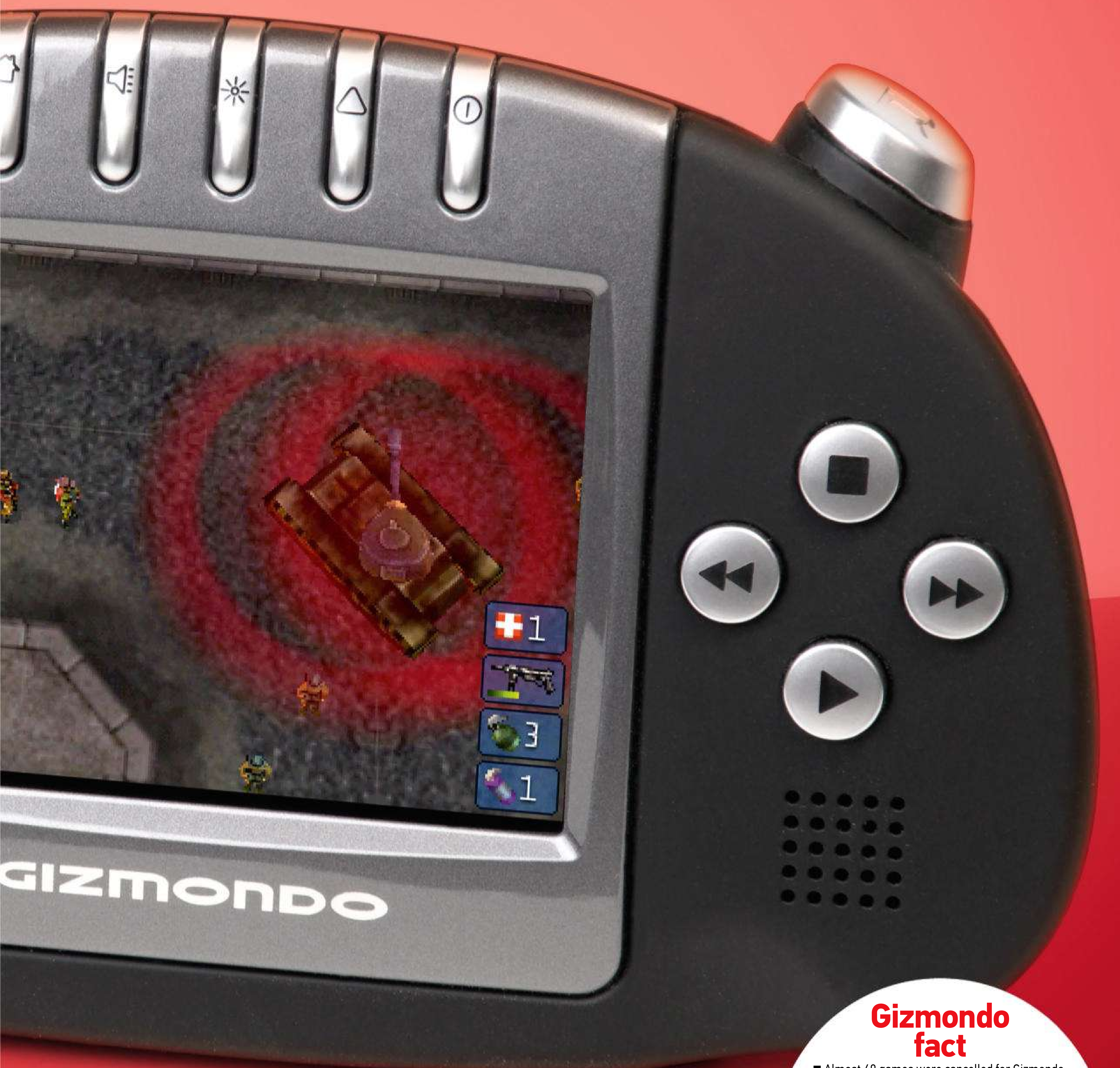
The wheels fell off within a year of the March 2005 launch. Despite celebrity promotion, a slow but steady stream of games and the introduction of an ad-supported model for just £129.99, the handheld failed to sell well. The software library had expanded to 14 games by October 2005, and eight of those would accompany the system's North American launch that month. They would be the final Gizmondo games released, as Tiger Telematics collapsed into bankruptcy in February 2006, amidst news reports that a company director had ties to a Swedish organised crime group.

ESSENTIAL GAME

Sticky Balls

Originally designed by John Pickford in his spare time while he was at Zed Two, the game transferred to Warthog when Zed Two was purchased, and was set to become a PSP game before Warthog itself was purchased, becoming Gizmondo Studios Manchester. The puzzle game vaguely resembles snooker, as you use a cue to shoot balls around a playfield. When balls of the same colour collide, they stick together – hence the title – and once a few of them are clustered, they disappear and earn you points. It's a unique and cool idea, trapped on a system that is inaccessible to almost everyone.





Gizmondo fact

- Almost 40 games were cancelled for Gizmondo, including *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Rayman* and *MechAssault*. One we particularly liked the look of was *Conflict Vietnam* (which we've pictured here).

PROCESSORS: 32-BIT ARM9 (400MHZ) **RAM:** 128MB DDR RAM
GRAPHICS: NVIDIA GOFORCE 3D 4500 (1.2MB SRAM)
DISPLAY: 2.8 INCH TFT (320X240 RESOLUTION)
AUDIO: STEREO SOUND **MEDIA:** SD/MMC MEMORY CARDS
COMMUNICATIONS: BLUETOOTH, GPRS
OPERATING SYSTEM: WINDOWS CE
OTHER FEATURES: MPEG 4/MP3 MEDIA PLAYBACK, GPS TRACKING, SMS/MMS TEXT MESSAGING, WAP INTERNET, CAMERA

SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

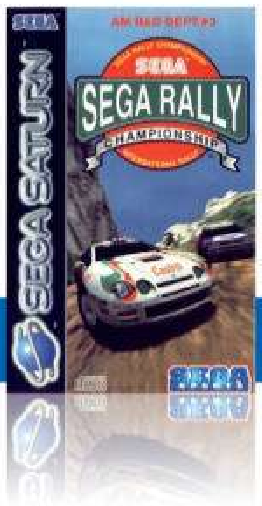
SATURN ARCADE PORTS

If you were an arcade fan in the Nineties then Sega's Saturn was an essential console. Boasting stellar ports from the likes of Sega, Capcom, Taito and SNK, it was a haven for fighters, shmups and racing games, many of which remain exclusive today

Words by Ashley Day

EASY PRICE, MAYBE

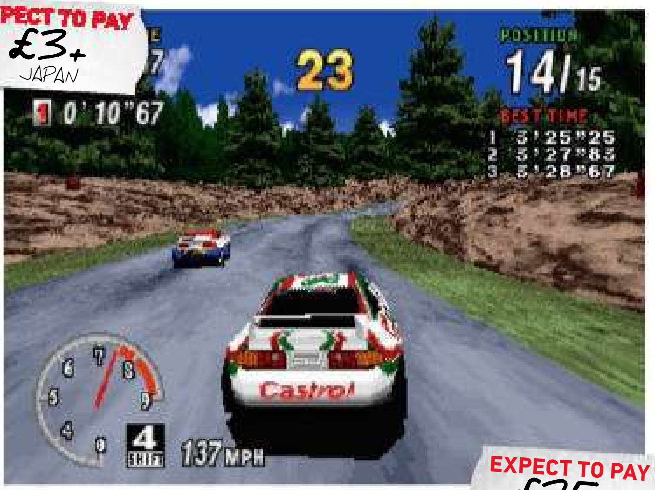
SEGA RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP



DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1995

■ *Sega Rally Championship* is still one of the greatest arcade racers of all time, thanks to its superb handling, dynamic track design and memorable speech effects, and the Saturn port was a technical tour-de-force that miraculously brought the thrills of the coin-op home on much lower-spec hardware. In fact, outside of an obscure Japan-only PS2 port given away with copies of the import-only *Sega Rally 2006*, the Saturn version remains the best way to play at home.

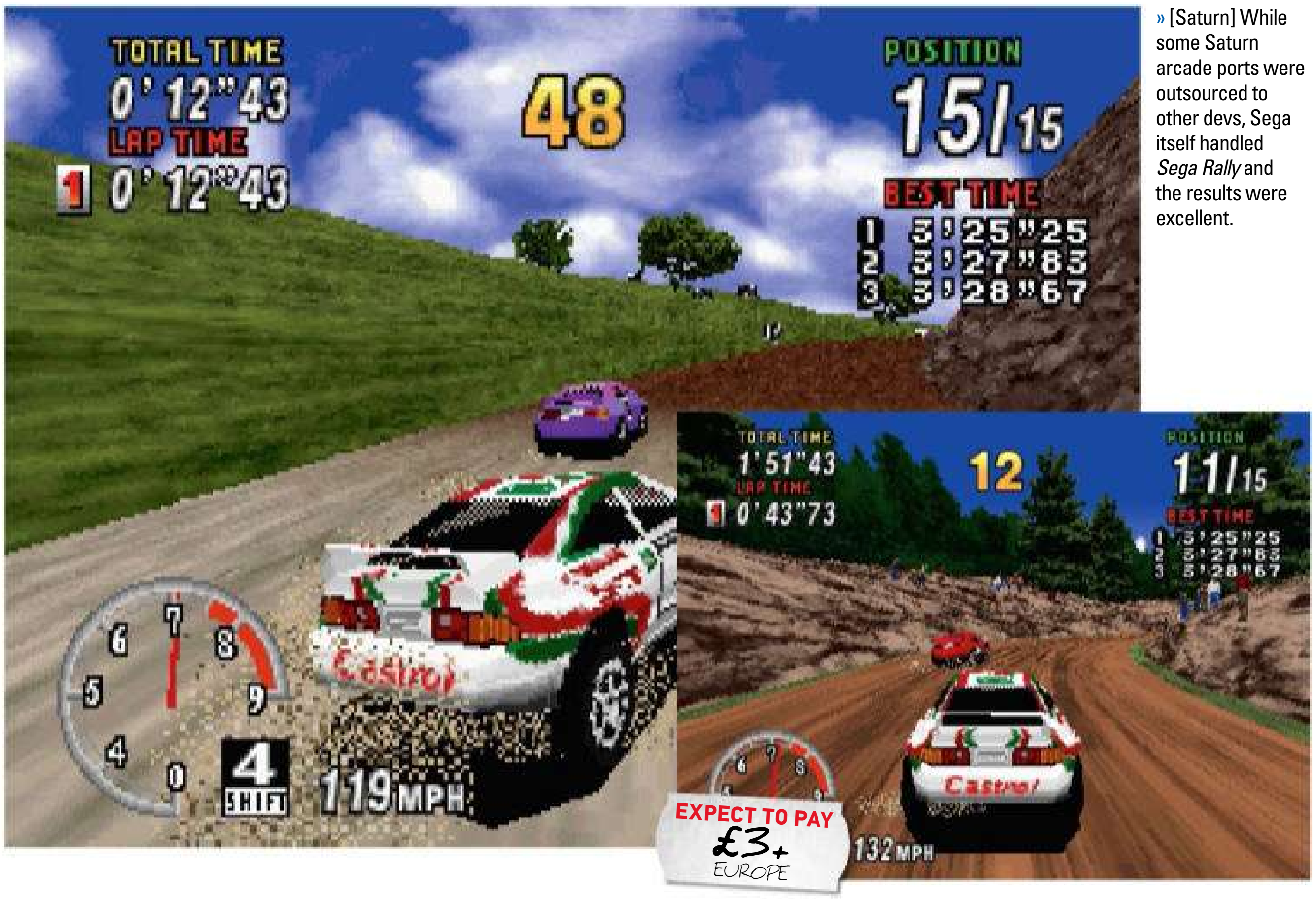
If you're looking to get behind the wheel of the Lancia Delta or Toyota Celica once more then it's best to avoid the US release, which is considerably overpriced and also visually inferior to the Japanese and European versions. The PAL conversion was even optimised for 50Hz screens to run at full speed and full screen, so you really can't go wrong at that bargain price. But if you want to splash out a little more, get the Japanese *Sega Rally Championship Plus*, which was created to support online play but also works with the analogue controller for better steering.



EXPECT TO PAY £3+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ USA

» [Saturn] "Left hand down a bit." Corners are your worst enemy in *Sega Rally Championship*.



» [Saturn] While some Saturn arcade ports were outsourced to other devs, Sega itself handled *Sega Rally* and the results were excellent.

EXPECT TO PAY £3+ EUROPE

THE WHEEL DEAL

Steer into the Saturn Racing Controller

ARCADE RACER
ANALOG STEERING WHEEL
SEGA SATURN

Though pricey on release, the Saturn's Racing Controller can be snapped up for about £15-20 these days and is well worth investing in if you like racing games. This is one of the better wheels of the era, with full analogue steering, big gear buttons under the wheel that feel satisfying to click in, and an adjustable neck and feet so you can hold the wheel firmly in place between the legs. It's compatible with a wide range of racing games, including *Sega Rally*, *Daytona USA*, *Out Run* and *Power Drift*, and is available in three colours: black, grey or white.

Photo courtesy of Adam Buchanan (Twitter @Cauterize)

BRUCIE BONUS

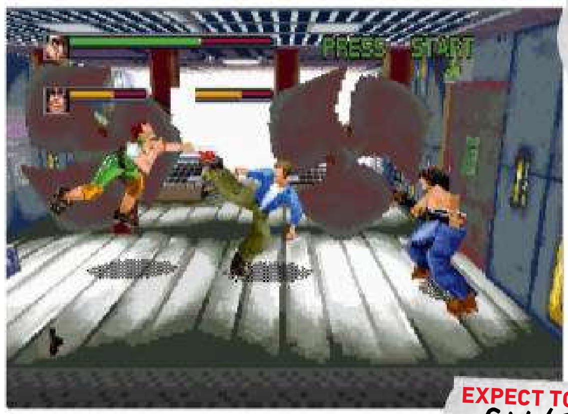
DIE HARD ARCADE

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1997

EXPECT TO PAY £34+ JAPAN

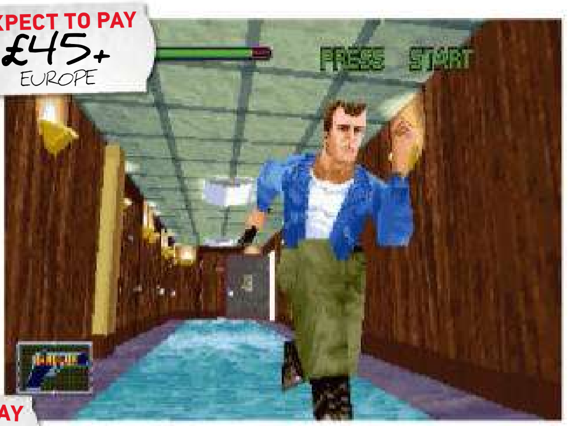
■ An unusually good licensed game, *Die Hard Arcade* boasts a rough and tumble combat style that makes you feel like an ordinary cop thrust into extraordinary circumstances. You'll clumsily grapple, stick the knee in, fall over a lot and wield any object you can pick up, in a desperate attempt to make it out of the skyscraper alive. The Saturn disc also features *Deep Scan*, one of Sega's oldest coin-ops, from 1979, which you can play to earn extra lives in *Die Hard Arcade*. So you technically get two arcade ports in one!

Die Hard Arcade's price has been steadily rising for years as, outside of a Japan-only PS2 port, it's the only way to play this excellent game at home. If you can, go for *Dynamite Deka*, the cheaper Japanese version, which lacks the licence but is otherwise identical.



» [Saturn] *Die Hard Arcade* was using QTEs, three years before *Shenmue* started to popularise them.

EXPECT TO PAY £45+ EUROPE



» [Saturn] This is the exact moment when Bruce Willis started phoning it in.

EXPECT TO PAY £140+ USA

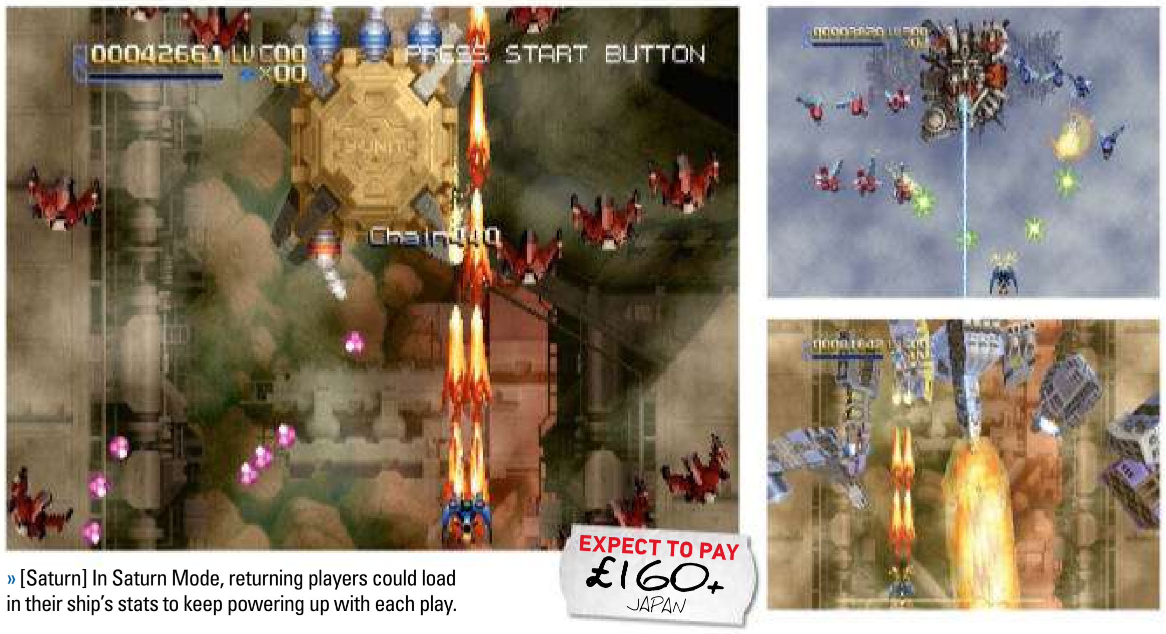
WARNING: NO REFUND

RADIANT SILVERGUN

DEVELOPER:	TREASURE
RELEASE:	1998

■ Released late in the Saturn's life, and only in Japan, *Radiant Silvergun* was quickly snapped up by collectors who realised Treasure had developed an esoteric shooter that's rich and rewarding to play. It didn't take too long for the value to sharply rise, making *Radiant Silvergun* one of the more expensive games on the system.

If you just want to play this excellent shoot-'em-up then the good news is that you can still buy the Xbox 360 version digitally for the bargain price of £9.99. It's even backward compatible so you can play it on an Xbox One or Series X! Which makes the Saturn version more of a collector's item, but what a collector's item it is… If you own a Saturn and you love shmups then this would make a great centrepiece to your collection.



» [Saturn] In Saturn Mode, returning players could load in their ship's stats to keep powering up with each play.

EXPECT TO PAY £160+ JAPAN

CHEAP SHOT

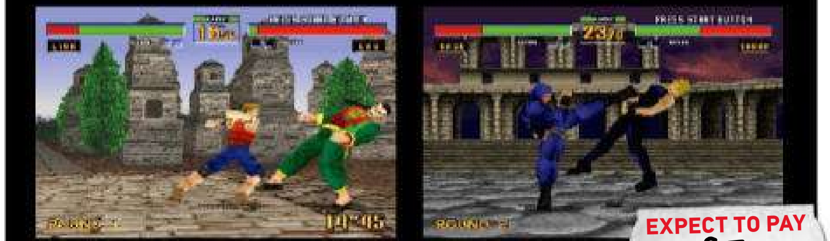
VIRTUA FIGHTER 2

DEVELOPER:	SEGA
RELEASE:	1995

EXPECT TO PAY £5+ EUROPE

■ *Virtua Fighter* was one of the crown jewels of Sega's arcade line-up in the mid-Nineties, thanks both to its cutting edge 3D graphics as well as its supremely deep, technical fighting system, which has ensured it stands the test of time even when the graphics have aged 25+ years. The Saturn conversion was hotly anticipated in 1995 and did not disappoint! Though it wasn't quite arcade perfect – the backgrounds are cleverly disguised 2D backdrops rather than true 3D – it runs at a blistering 60 frames per second and even layers on more depth than the arcade version with the addition of Team Battle mode and 'Virtua Fighter 2.1', which added in tons of little balancing tweaks, almost like a downloadable update would today. Like *Sega Rally*, the PAL version of *Virtua Fighter 2* was optimised and supremely playable, so no matter your region of choice, Sega's landmark fighter is a total bargain!

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ JAPAN



» [Saturn] Did you know, *VF3* was in the works for Saturn but was sadly scrapped. Some of its features did end up in *Fighters Megamix* though.

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ USA

FIGHT CLUB

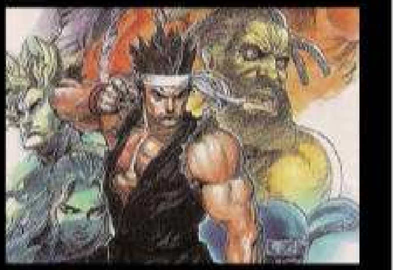
Three spin-offs on Saturn

Virtua Fighter Kids

Essentially *VF2* but with 'super deformed' versions of the characters and daft humour, *Virtua Fighter Kids* should probably have been a bonus mode rather than a full release, but that only makes its existence more audacious, and all the more collectible.

Virtua Fighter Remix

This reissue of *VF1* boasts improved visuals and gameplay tweaks, and was given away free to Saturn owners in the US. Interestingly, all three regions sport unique cover art. The European box uses 3D character models, the Japanese version has art by *Legend Of Zelda* illustrator Katsuya Terada, while the US box reuses the cover to the Marvel Comics tie-in.



Fighters Megamix

This superb crossover game primarily pitted the casts of *Virtua Fighter* and *Fighting Vipers* against each other, as well as several more Sega guests from the likes of *Sonic The Fighters*, *Virtua Cop* and even the car from *Daytona USA*!

COLLECTING TIPS!

Avoid the US

■ Japan has the best selection, of course, but second best is actually Europe where titles tend to be much cheaper than the US and were often optimised.

Don't lose your memory

■ Make sure to keep stocked up with CR2032 batteries or, better yet, invest in a memory cart to keep your save data backed up.

SCART of fighting

■ You want your Saturn games to look as good as possible, right? Get yourself an RGB SCART cable and play on a CRT, the way Sega intended! [Or a PVM - Ed]

Stick up for yourself

■ The Saturn pad is great for fighting games, but if you prefer a stick, make sure to get the excellent Japanese Virtua Stick and not the far inferior Western model.

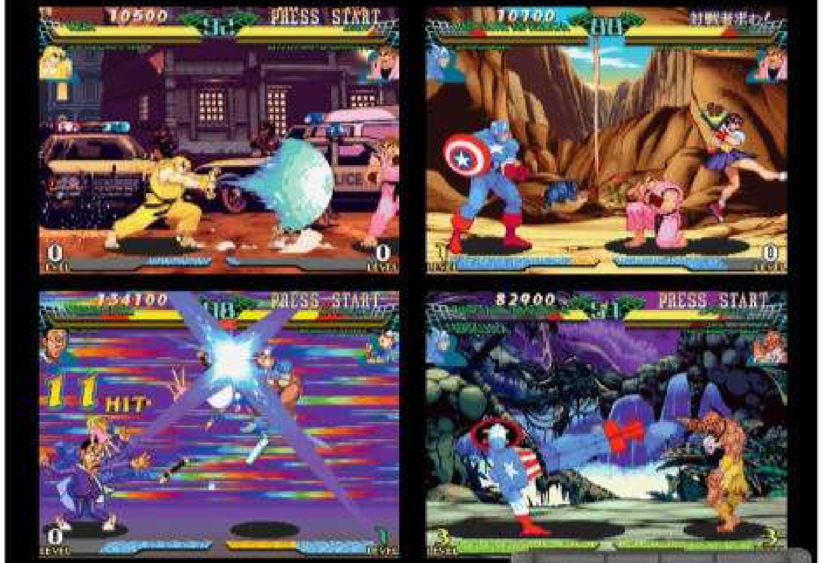
MARVELLOUS VALUE

MARVEL SUPER HEROES VS STREET FIGHTER

EXPECT TO PAY
£33+
JAPAN

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
RELEASE: 1998

■ If you want to play *Marvel Super Heroes Vs Street Fighter* at home then the Saturn conversion is the only way to go. Yes, it was also ported to PlayStation, but that version didn't come with a 4MB RAM cart you could plug into the console to throw around all those gorgeous sprites at once. So unlucky PlayStation owners completely missed out on the game's iconic tag team gameplay, while Saturn got the real deal, upgraded from *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* with the new Variable Assists, which let you summon your partner to perform a special move without tagging out. When you see it in action, it's hard to believe you're not playing in the arcade.



» [Saturn] *Marvel Vs Street Fighter* is the only game in the series to feature Norima, a unique character created by a Japanese comedian.

RAM IT DOWN

Why you need a 4MB RAM cart

Marvel Super Heroes Vs Street Fighter requires the 4MB RAM cart, so expect to pay a bit more if you don't already have one. Once you do though, it can be used with plenty more arcade conversions including the technically astonishing *Street Fighter Zero 3* or Neo Geo ports like *Metal Slug* and *Waku Waku 7*. There are about 20 Saturn games that require or make optional use of the RAM cart, so it's well worth getting one.

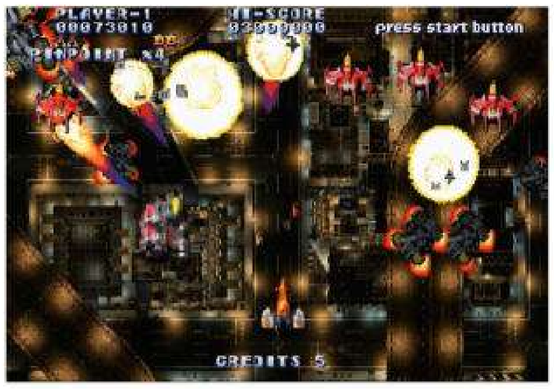
BUDGET IS BEST

SOUKYUGURENTAI

EXPECT TO PAY
£50+
JAPAN

DEVELOPER: RAIZING
RELEASE: 1997

■ On a console blessed with many great shoot-'em-ups, *Soukyugurentai* (also known as *Terra Diver* in arcades) is one of the best. Similar to Taito's *Layer Section*, it furnishes your ship with a lock-on web that lets you target and take down multiple enemies at once as they fly into view or rise up from beneath, thanks to some visually stunning sprite-scaling effects. The gameplay is fast and empowering, while the graphics are spectacular. Stage 3's descent through the clouds, as tiny tanks gradually grow to full size as you reach the earth, just has to be played to be believed! *Soukyugurentai* is one of the more affordable shmups on the Saturn so you get a lot of bang for your buck. This is especially true if you get the budget re-release, *Soukugurentai Okuyo*, which includes a demo of the insanely expensive *Battle Garegga* on the same disc.



» [Saturn] There are three different ships to choose from in *Soukyugurentai*, each with a different shaped lock-on web.

GOING UP

ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS

EXPECT TO PAY
£160+
JAPAN

DEVELOPER: TAITO
RELEASE: 1997

■ Taito's sequel to its 1983 classic doesn't so much expand on the formula as it does completely blow the doors off! The basic premise of roaming the corridors and elevators of tower blocks is largely the same, and the first stage is essentially a remake of this, but it's not long before *Elevator Action Returns* goes completely OTT. The sprite-scaling effects are off the charts, the action ever-so slightly insane and the pacing feels new and surprising on almost every screen.

If you'd like to pay quite a lot less for *Elevator Action Returns* then the arcade version is available on the rather wonderful *Taito Legends 2* compilation, but this version has blurrier visuals and other imperfections compared to the Saturn port. The latter also includes the original game as an unlockable extra, which is neat. Though after playing *Returns*, you won't want to go back!

MORE GAMES TO CONSIDER

DECATHLETE

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1996
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£35+** JAPAN **£5+** USA **£30+**

LAYER SECTION

DEVELOPER: TAITO
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£48+** JAPAN **£31+** USA **£36+**

BAKU BAKU ANIMAL

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1996
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£14+** JAPAN **£5+** USA **£5+**

KINGDOM GRAND PRIX

DEVELOPER: RAIZING
RELEASED: 1996
EXPECT TO PAY
JAPAN **£60+**

DAYTONA USA

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1995
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£4+** JAPAN **£1+** USA **£28+**

JUSTIFIED PURCHASE

VIRTUA COP 2

EXPECT TO PAY £4+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £45+ USA

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: 1996

■ Lightgun games were a staple of the arcades in the Nineties, and AM2's *Virtua Cop* series was the purist's choice. Its simple yet elegant design delivered a finely balanced challenge with optional score attack complexity. For the truly hardcore, the 'Justice Shots' rewarded expert players for disarming the baddies with a well-aimed shot to the hand. If you can do that throughout the whole game then you're one virtua show off!

Virtua Cop 2 is generally a faster paced, more dynamic sequel, with more movement and the option to choose your route at certain points for extra replayability. It sells at a low price, but you'll also want the Virtua Gun, which is about £20 more, and compatible with 12 other Saturn games, so it's certainly worth it.

EXPECT TO PAY £4+ JAPAN

» [Saturn] If only the port of *The House Of The Dead* had been as good as the Saturn's *Virtua Cop* conversions.

WORTH A BOB OR TWO

BUBBLE SYMPHONY

EXPECT TO PAY £90+ JAPAN

DEVELOPER: TAITO
RELEASE: 1997

■ Much like *Elevator Action Returns*, *Bubble Symphony* is a Taito sequel that supersizes everything about the original. It's more colourful, it's cuter, the sprites are bigger and more impressive, and the co-op mode now allows for four little dragons to play together. There are tons of levels to play, with branching routes so you can see different stages every time, and there are plenty of new little gameplay features, including the *Rainbow Islands*-inspired rainbow bubbles. Taito fans will also love spotting all the references to the developer's other arcade hits, including the iconic Yamato boss from *Darius II*.

As with *Elevator Actions Returns*, *Bubble Symphony* was included in *Taito Legends 2* but it suffers from the same graphical issues, so the Saturn version is the best home port there is, if you can stomach the price.

» [Saturn] Taito was the master of cute platformers, and its skill for adorable visuals was in overdrive on Saturn!

STICK WITH IT

VIRTUAL ON: CYBER TROOPERS

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASE: 1996

■ A real heavy-duty arcade game, *Virtual On* put you behind the controls of a giant fighting mecha, satisfyingly operated by two large sticks. Moving the sticks like tank controls, in the same direction to quickly move and in opposing directions to turn, really made you feel like you were piloting a giant robot, and it was… awesome.

Sadly, the arcade cabinet was pretty uncommon (this writer has only ever seen one at the Sega World in London's Trocadero) and has only become more rare with time. So it's handy that Sega produced a set of official 'Twin-Sticks' to go along with the Japanese release of the Saturn port. You're looking at about £45 for the sticks, but they're so much fun to use, and although they were only released in Japan, they will work with the US and European versions too.

» [Saturn] The robots of *Virtual On* all have sleek, colourful designs. The Saturn mounted into their backs is a nice touch.

ROBOT ROLL CALL

More mecha games for your Twin-Sticks

EXPECT TO PAY £6+ JAPAN

GunGriffon 2

More of a hardcore simulation than *Virtual On*, Game Arts' *GunGriffon 2* is a solid alternative to *Armored Core*, where epic battles play out in a first-person perspective. The one notable addition over the first game, other than Twin-Stick compatibility, is the 'Double Seater' mode, which allows two players to co-pilot one mech together.

Mobile Suit Gundam Side Story: The Blue Destiny

This trilogy of games adapted from the long-running anime series, was collected into a single compilation of which parts two and three supported the *Virtual On* Twin-Sticks. Mechanically these play a lot like *GunGriffon 2* but at a much faster, more arcade-like pace.

SALAMANDER DELUXE PACK

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
RELEASED: 1997
EXPECT TO PAY
JAPAN **£55+**

STREET FIGHTER ZERO 3

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
RELEASED: 1989
EXPECT TO PAY
JAPAN **£120+**

SEXY PARODIUS

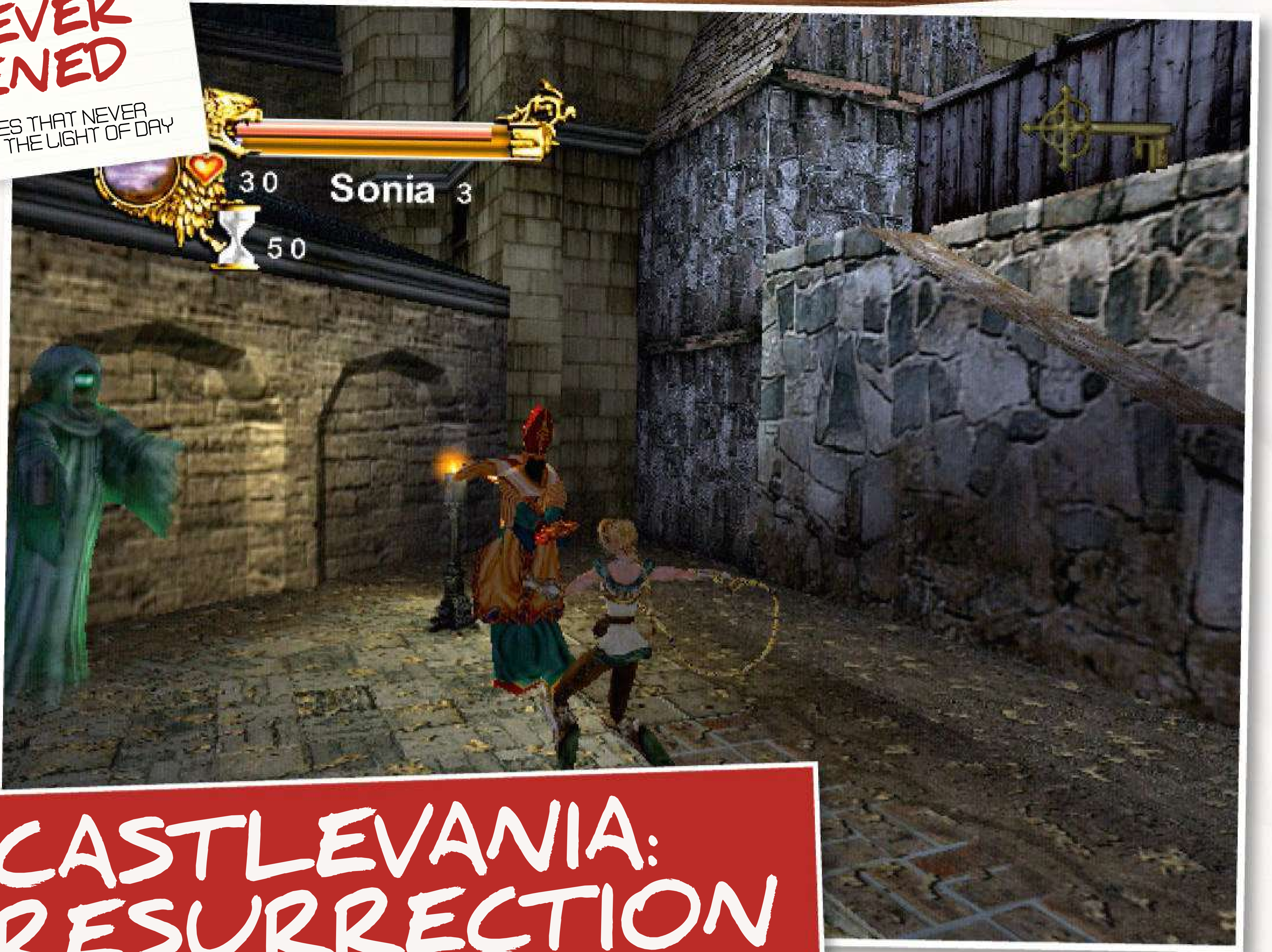
DEVELOPER: KONAMI
RELEASED: 1996
EXPECT TO PAY
JAPAN **£35+**

LAST BRONX

DEVELOPER: SEGA
RELEASED: 1997
EXPECT TO PAY
EUROPE **£12+** JAPAN **£10+** USA **£45+**

METAL BLACK

DEVELOPER: TAITO
RELEASED: 1996
EXPECT TO PAY
JAPAN **£80+**



» [Dreamcast] As is so often the case in *Castlevania*, Sonia's whip was to be her main monster-slaying tool.

CASTLEVANIA: RESURRECTION

How did Konami's most eagerly anticipated project for the Dreamcast end up with a wooden stake driven through its heart?

Words by Nick Thorpe

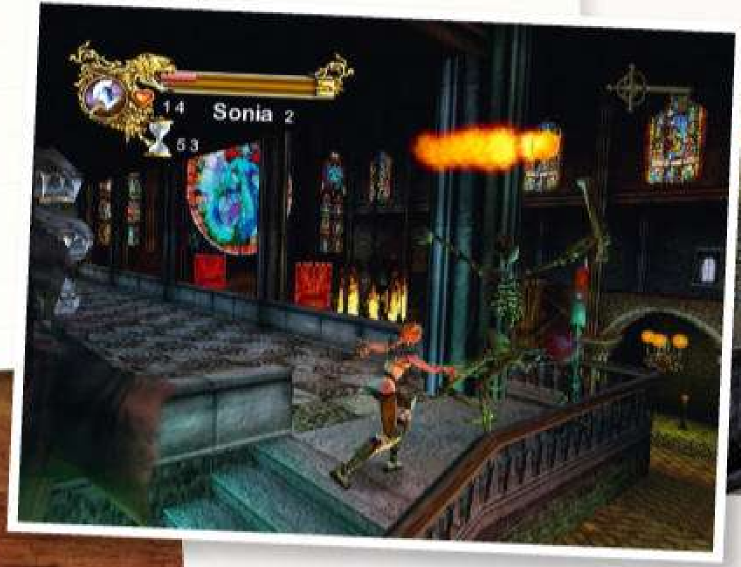
IN THE KNOW

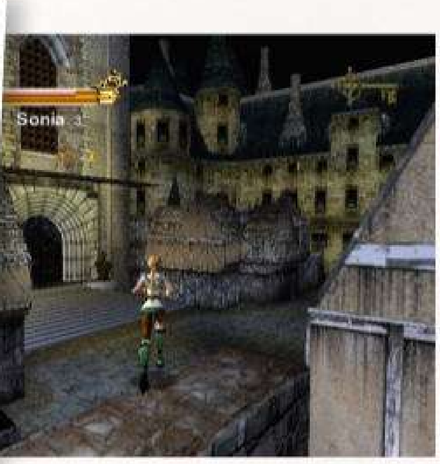
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
- » **SYSTEM:** DREAMCAST
- » **DUE FOR RELEASE:** 2000

If you've ever conversed with a hardcore Dreamcast fan, you might have come across a lingering resentment towards third-party publishers, mostly for not having given their full backing to Sega's last throw of the dice. If you look at the releases from some of the big names, it's fair to say that their commitment might have been less than total – and Konami definitely falls under that category. *Silent Scope* was a popular arcade game, but beyond that? Dreamcast owners might have hoped for *Metal Gear Solid* and *International Superstar Soccer*, but what they got was *Deadly Skies* and *The Grinch*. However, Konami had intended on bringing one of its biggest series to the Dreamcast, only for the project to fail.

Castlevania: Resurrection was one of the earlier major announcements for the Dreamcast, and would have been a 3D action-adventure game similar in style to the previous 3D *Castlevania* game for the N64. This was a fairly unpopular direction at the time, as the broad consensus amongst players was that it had failed to reach the same high standards as the 2D PlayStation game *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*. Still, the game was being handled by a completely different team. Where *Castlevania* for the N64 had been developed by Konami's team in Kobe, the team making *Castlevania: Resurrection* was based in San Francisco.

In story terms, the game would have been set in the year 1666 and followed the adventures of two time-travelling members of the Belmont clan. Victor Belmont, a new protagonist from the 19th century who had rejected his vampire hunting lineage, would have mysteriously found himself in the past. His ancestor Sonia Belmont, originally introduced in the Game Boy game *Castlevania: Legends*, would have been catapulted a couple of hundred years into the future to join him. The game design was intentionally linear in order to evoke the feeling of the older games in the series, rather than taking the focus on exploration from *Symphony Of The Night*. Public anticipation for the game built as the game was shown to the press at E3 in 1999.





» [Dreamcast] The opening environment is decently large, has plenty to do and looks quite nice.

FIND YOUR THRILLS SOMEWHERE ELSE

CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS

1999, KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT KOBE

■ The N64 games aren't universally beloved, but they're not quite as bad as some make them out to be. If you want a sense of what 3D *Castlevania* was like when *Castlevania: Resurrection* was in development, this is your best option.

NIGHTMARE CREATURES II

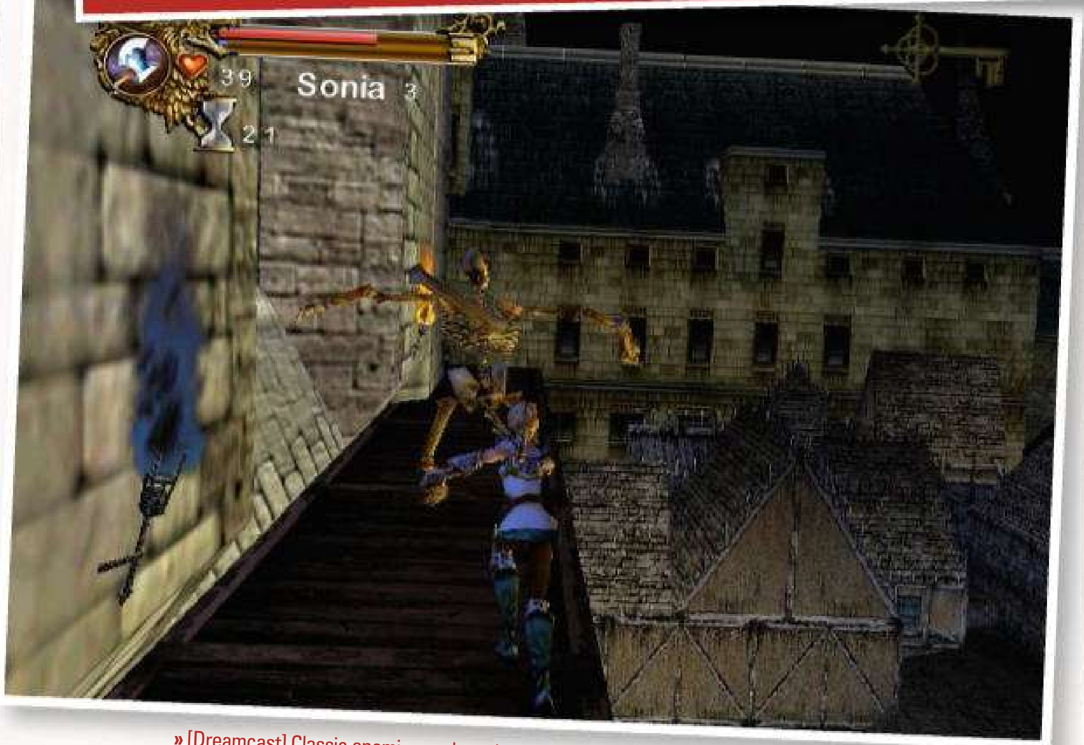
2000, KONAMI

■ Konami did get around to publishing a 3D horror-themed game for the Dreamcast, but it wasn't a *Castlevania*. Kalisto Entertainment's game also wasn't particularly good, earning a rotten reception from the Dreamcast press.

CASTLEVANIA

2003, KONAMI

■ The next attempt at a 3D *Castlevania*, and arguably the first one to have got it right, was this PS2 game – known as *Lament Of Innocence* elsewhere. Koji Igarashi took the helm here, and his exploration-heavy style is easily recognisable.

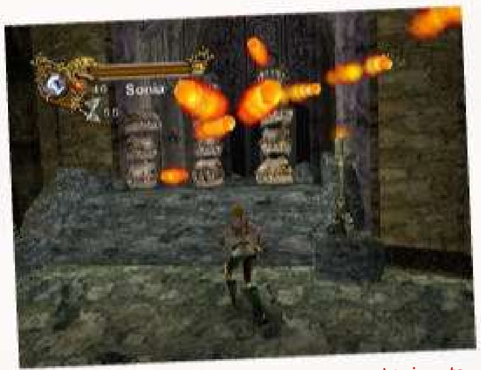


» [Dreamcast] Classic enemies such as the bone-throwing skeletons are present and correct in the prototype.

> "For over two decades Castlevania: Resurrection was thought to be lost"

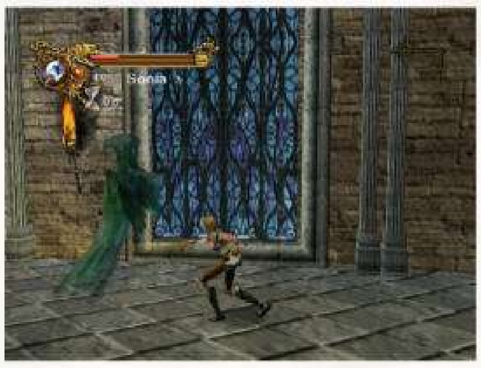
Unfortunately, things had never been rosy behind the scenes. On his personal website, artist Jason Lee Elliott describes it as having been "doomed from the start", noting that most of the team that had been doing preproduction work on *Castlevania* were let go early on. He believed that "most of the team had only ever worked on sports games so they had no idea how to make a 3D action platformer" and that the art team "couldn't agree on a direction". The game had apparently been in development for the better part of two years, and "had little to show". Jason resigned from Konami a few months prior to the game's cancellation.

In an interview with fan site The Castlevania Dungeon, art director Greg Orduyan claimed that the team was "the best [Konami] had available to them" at the time. He claimed that early negative reactions from the press were "based off rumours leaked by some people within Konami who had their own agenda", and that a working prototype turned opinions around as it "looked and played better than most of the titles for the Dreamcast at the time". Apparently, the game was "pretty far" in development at the time of its cancellation, with a working version that needed "balancing and tweaking and putting it all together". Rumours of the game's cancellation first started to appear in September 1999, though they were denied by Konami. The game was officially delayed in December 1999, with no specific release date given, and in March 2000 news broke that the project was on indefinite hold. The game's senior producer cited a "lack of development resources", and the press speculated that the game may shift platforms, but the reality is that the game was cancelled outright. Greg Orduyan noted that "the game was cancelled the same day that Sony announced the PS2", and that the decision "affected every single DC game Konami was developing worldwide". Jason Lee Elliott further noted that "the entire studio was closed down" following the cancellation of the game.

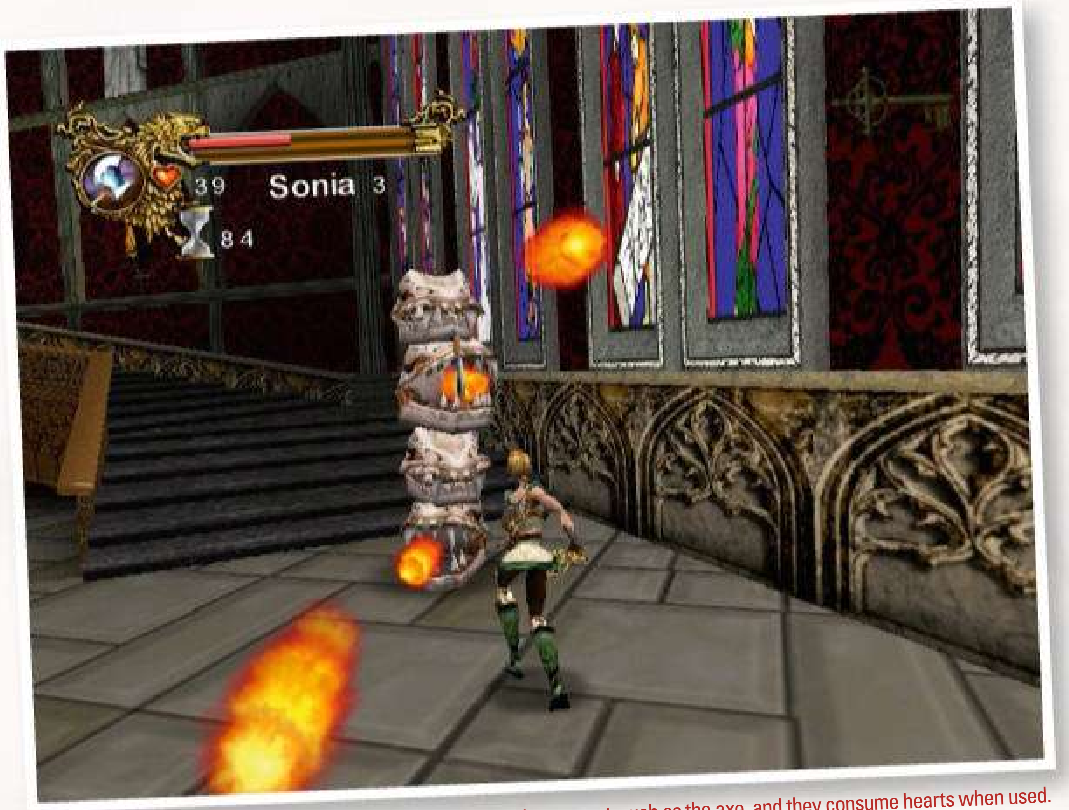


» [Dreamcast] There's not a lot of thought given to balance at this stage, hence the barrage of fireballs.

For over two decades *Castlevania: Resurrection* was thought to be completely lost. However, in 2021 a 'pre-E3 demo' of the game was put up for auction. This GD-R disc was obtained by the Swiss collector Comby Laurent and made available online. The game is in a very early state, with a limited number of rooms and enemies to be seen, as well as a simple boss encounter with Medusa. While it's clearly quite rough and nowhere near ready for release, the potential is obvious – the visuals are of a high quality for the console's early life, with some lovely environments and lighting. It's possible that a more advanced build of the game exists, but for now, this will be your best option to experience the game as it could have been, as Konami has shown no interest in reviving the concepts intended for *Castlevania: Resurrection* since the game's cancellation. *



» [Dreamcast] The ghosts have some pretty cool transparency effects and warp out of existence nicely.



» [Dreamcast] The usual sub-weapons are also present, such as the axe, and they consume hearts when used.

THE MAKING OF THE SUFF

TRADITIONAL SURVIVAL HORROR MEANT FIXED CAMERAS, TANK CONTROLS AND HELPLESS CHARACTERS. THE SUFFERING AND ITS SEQUEL TOOK A SHARPENED PRISON SHANK TO THIS IDEA, PRESENTING PLAYERS WITH AN ULTRAVIOLENT SHOOTER BURSTING WITH GUNS, GORE AND DEMONS BOTH FIGURATIVE AND LITERAL

WORDS BY JAMES DYSON

» Richard Rouse III, lead writer and director on *The Suffering*, creative director and writer on *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*. Richard now runs Paranoid Productions, a videogame consultancy, after recently serving as director on the indie title *The Church In The Darkness*.

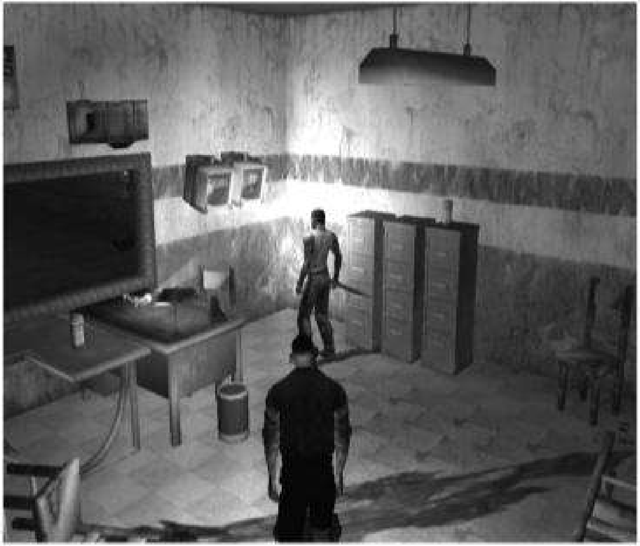
IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MIDWAY GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** SURREAL SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 2004, 2005
- » **PLATFORM:** PS2, XBOX, PC
- » **GENRE:** ACTION HORROR

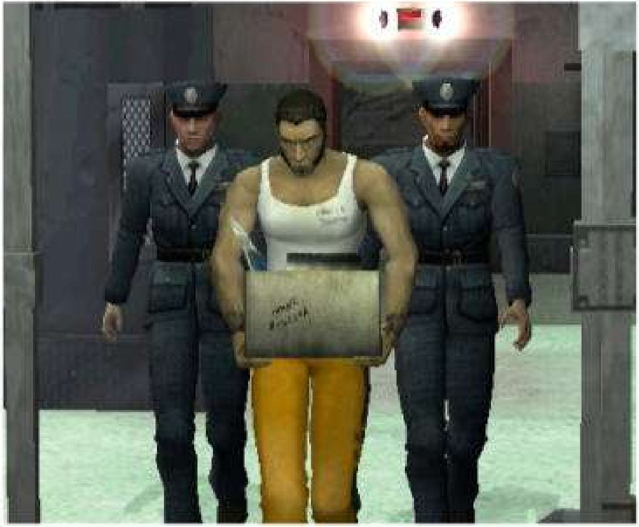
Prison is hell. This was an idea taken literally in *The Suffering* series, a pair of games released in the early Noughties for Windows, PlayStation 2 and Xbox. Following the story of convicted death-row inmate Torque, these horror shooters saw players pitted against a horde of twisted creatures as they attempted to escape a cursed prison island and then a monster-infested city.

The games were developed by Surreal Software, a Seattle-based company founded in 1995. Surreal's first title was *Drakan: Order Of The Flame*, a third-person fantasy action adventure released in 1999 for Windows. This was followed by a sequel, *The Ancients' Gates*, for the PlayStation 2 in 2002. As development on *The Ancients' Gates* was wrapping up, Surreal had begun pitching to Midway Games, developers of the *Mortal Kombat* franchise, for funding on its next project. Surreal had floated the possibility of doing a horror title; lacking an entry in the genre, Midway had embraced the idea and given the project the go-ahead.

The first *Suffering* was set inside Abbot State Penitentiary, an Alcatraz-like institution located off the coast of Maryland on the fictional Carnate Island. Carnate is an island with a dark and sordid history, on whose blood-soaked soil many an atrocity has been committed throughout the long centuries. The island is hit by a mysterious supernatural cataclysm shortly after Torque's arrival, unleashing a tide of homicidal creatures intent on killing him and anyone else they come across.



» [PC] Torque can interact with many objects in the game world, including lockers, telephones and CCTV cameras.



» [PS2] If you're expecting a Shawshank tale of redemption you're going to be very disappointed.

Originally called *Unspeakable*, the first idea for *The Suffering* was a game set in a haunted college town in America. After writing up the pitch document, however, this was quickly abandoned, as the developers felt that it resembled *Silent Hill* too closely. A prison environment was chosen instead. Not only did it offer unexplored potential as a horror setting, it also fit with one of the team's earliest ambitions, which was to make combat a central feature.

"We pushed big on [*The Suffering*] being action horror instead of survival horror," recalls Richard Rouse III, *The Suffering*'s lead designer and writer, "so we would call it that to emphasise that it was more of a shooter. This was before *Resident Evil 4* had come out, when you had tank controls that were sort of love them or hate them."

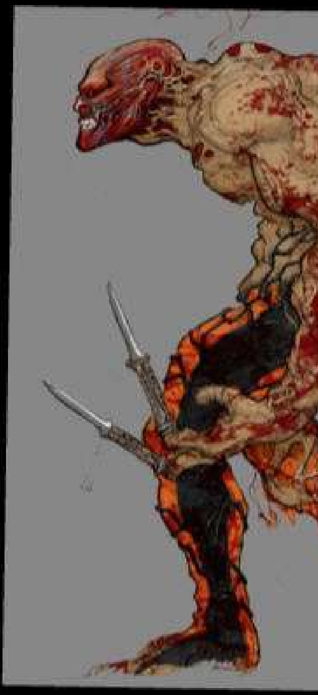
Searching for an alternative gameplay style, the team initially considered doing something in the vein of *Devil May Cry*, before landing on

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DRAKAN: ORDER OF THE FLAME
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1999

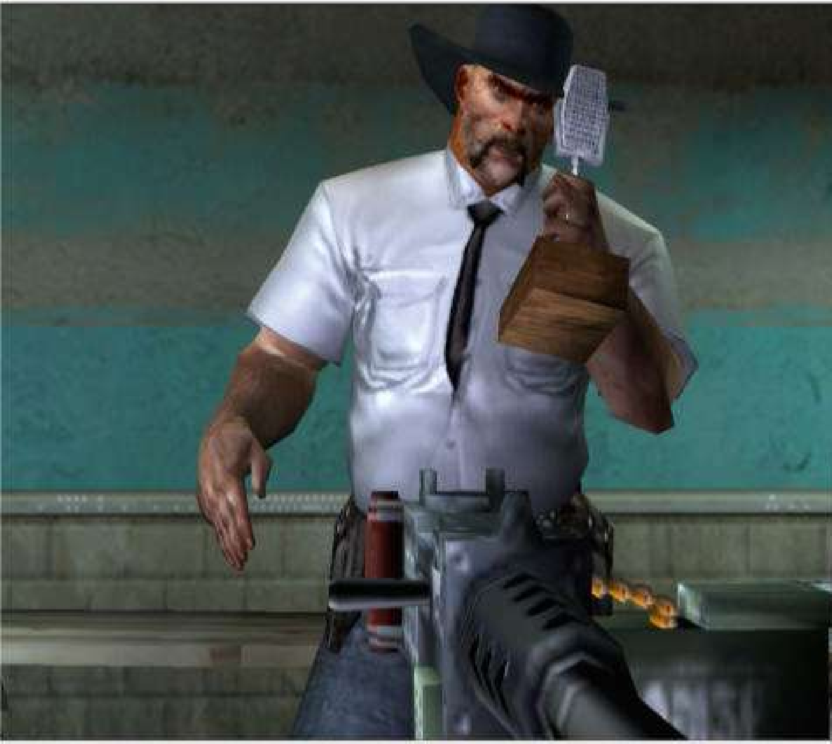
DRAKAN: THE ANCIENTS' GATE
SYSTEM: PC2
YEAR: 2002

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PS2, XBOX, PC, GBA
YEAR: 2002

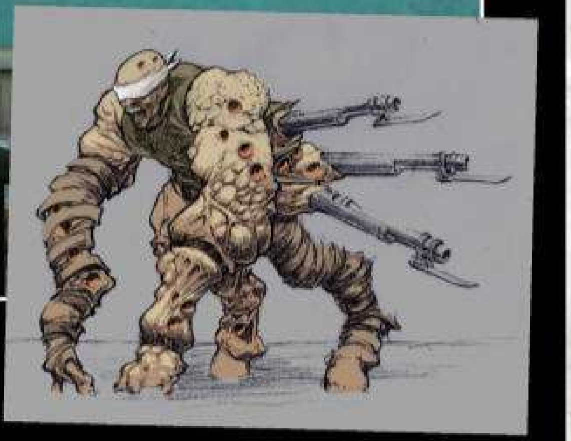


» One of the drawings for Torque's rage creature. Note the switchblade fingers.

ERING 1 & 2



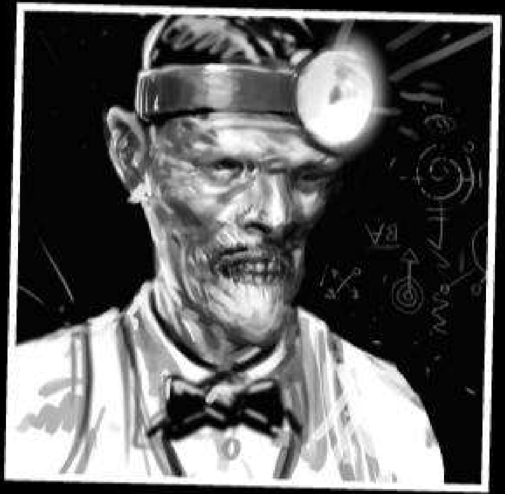
» [PC] Warden Hargrave, the notorious head honcho of Abbot. Dreaded by inmates and COs alike, the cataclysm finally makes him snap.



Half-Life's mixture of exploration and shooting as a reference point. Above all, the creators wanted to empower players where other horror titles disempowered them. "Traditional horror movies are often about weak protagonists who barely survive, and we weren't interested in having a weak protagonist," says Richard. "We wanted Torque to be a bit more of a power fantasy type; that he'd be the one guy who could survive where everyone else is dying. And that came from being frustrated with horror games that felt like they were undermining the player's abilities by making it difficult to aim or use the tools the games gave them."

As a result of this, Torque plays very differently to the standard horror game protagonist. Torque and the player camera can move freely in all directions, and where other horror characters may be content using bits of old plank or a dusty camera as weapons, Torque's arsenal includes dual revolvers, Tommy guns and sticks of dynamite. Players could also choose to control him in either a first-person or third-person mode, and could switch seamlessly between perspectives at the press of a button. Torque could also go into a horror equivalent of Hulk mode, transforming into a blade-armed monster equally the match of the creatures he faces. Whether this was real, or simply a

> "TRADITIONAL HORROR MOVIES ARE OFTEN ABOUT WEAK PROTAGONISTS WHO BARELY SURVIVE, AND WE WEREN'T INTERESTED IN HAVING A WEAK PROTAGONIST"
> **RICHARD ROUSE III**

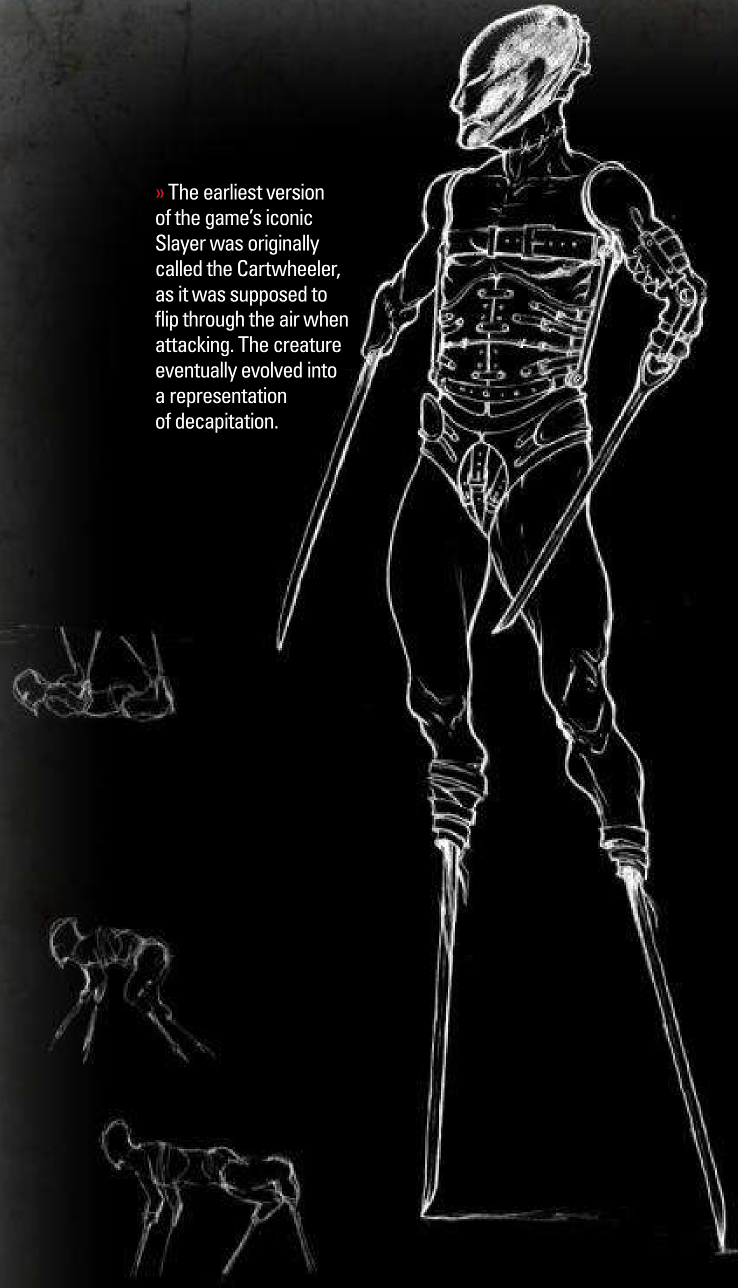


» A Vincent Price-esque ghost of a 19th-century doctor, Killjoy is an ambiguous ally throughout both games. Many on the development team were fans of *House On Haunted Hill* (both the 1959 version and 1999 remake). This character takes obvious inspiration from those films. (Vincent Price starred in the first film; the remake has a sinister doctor character who appears as though being projected from a film camera).

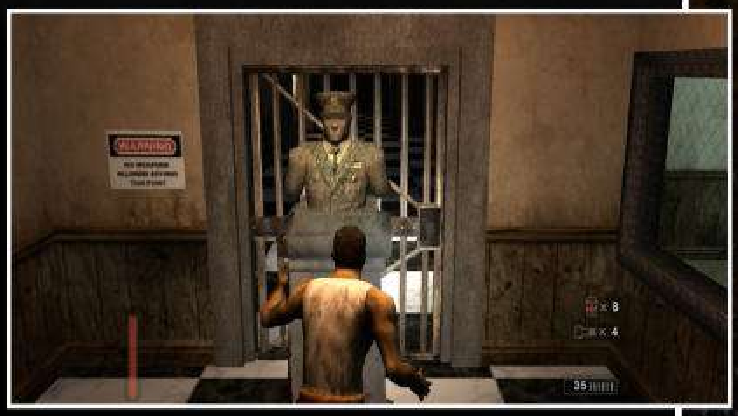
SCORING THE SUFFERING

HOW THE GAME'S DISTINCTIVE SOUND EFFECTS WERE CRAFTED

As any aficionado of the macabre will tell you, audio is crucial for getting that all-important sense of atmosphere right in a horror game. Surreal took this lesson to heart, creating a soundtrack for *The Suffering* that was both disturbing and uncanny. Screeching, grating sounds accompany music that has an almost industrial feel to it, as though the player is traversing one giant engine of torture and pain. To achieve this effect, the sound team used a wide variety of unconventional materials such as stones and aluminium rods in their recording sessions, producing audio signatures the listener wouldn't easily be able to place. These effects were then used as the basis for the music, created by composer Erik Aho. Throughout Torque's journey, these off-putting sounds are often used to heighten tension during quieter moments, whilst drum-laden tracks add a sense of frantic, pulse-pounding urgency in combat.



» The earliest version of the game's iconic Slayer was originally called the Cartwheeler, as it was supposed to flip through the air when attacking. The creature eventually evolved into a representation of decapitation.



» [PC] Though more action than survival horror, *The Suffering* contains some light puzzle-solving elements to break up the combat.

> “IT'S A LESSON FOR TEAMS IN GENERAL; IF YOU'VE GOT SOMEONE WHO'S GOOD AT A THING, LET THEM DO IT”
> **RICHARD ROUSE III**

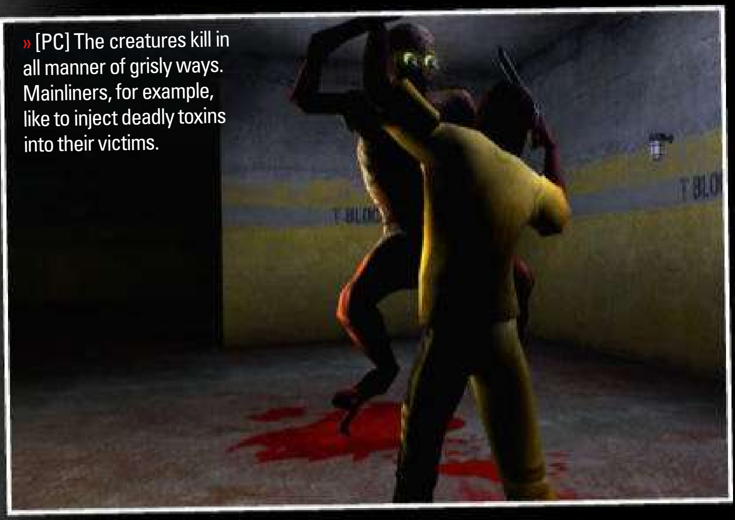
▶ hallucinatory manifestation of Torque's inner demons, was never conclusively resolved. Either way, it was unambiguously fun to tear enemies into bloody chunks in this form.

Arrayed against Torque were monsters summoned from the cursed earth of Carnate itself, all reflecting a dark part of the island's history or a method of execution. For example, the Marksmen creatures were blindfolded humanoids with clusters of rifles growing out of their backs, representing death by firing squad, whilst the needle-ridden Mainliners were manifestations of death by lethal injection. The monsters were as interesting to fight as they were to look at. As well as creatures with unique abilities like scuttling on ceilings or burrowing underground, the game had a dismemberment system that allowed players to shoot off limbs, heads and whole upper torsos in grisly fashion.

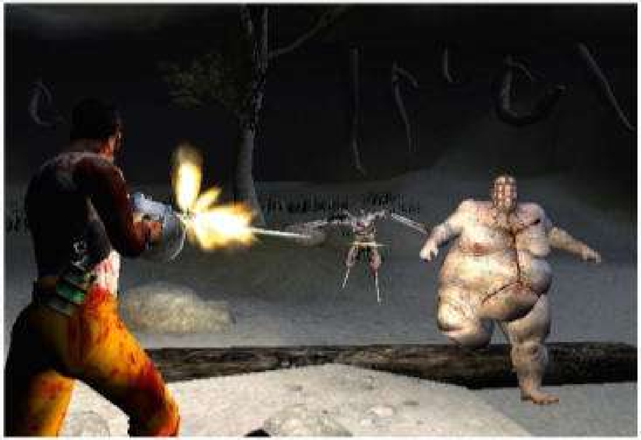
The unique style of *The Suffering*'s monsters were largely the brainchild of a single talented artist and his own distinct aesthetic. Ben Olsen had been hired by Surreal in 1997 and had worked on the *Drakan* series, after which he was moved onto *The Suffering* project. In the early stages of the project, the team hadn't been certain what the game's enemies would look like, except that they didn't want them to follow common horror tropes like zombies or werewolves. As Richard explains, the idea of creating monsters themed on executions emerged primarily from Ben's artistic process.

“If you ever went and visited Ben's cubicle, he'd always have these comic books he was drawing,” he says. “It was always weird stuff, weirder than what's in the game, and I remember saying, ‘Well, wouldn't it be cool if the creatures were like the stuff that Ben draws?’ So it wasn't so much a case that we had a vision [for the monsters] as it was one of, ‘Hey, we've got this guy who can do this; let's let him do this stuff.’ It's a lesson for teams in general; if you've got someone who's good at a thing, let them do it.”

Besides creating original enemies, another challenge the designers faced was building an environment interesting enough to keep players engaged; with its many identical cells and utilitarian furnishings, a prison could easily have become too monotonous. The answer lay in fleshing out Carnate with various locations from its troubled past. Not only did this ensure that the game world was sufficiently varied, it also allowed the creative team to make the island feel like a character in its own right. Besides Abbot Penitentiary, Torque's journey



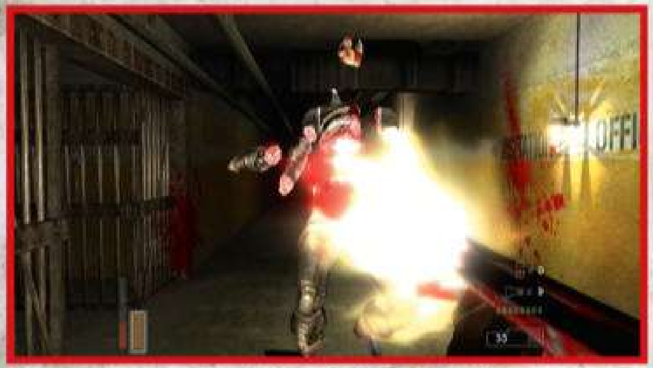
» [PC] The creatures kill in all manner of grisly ways. Mainliners, for example, like to inject deadly toxins into their victims.



» [Xbox] There are plenty of gruesome enemies in *The Suffering*. Prepare for some sleepless nights.

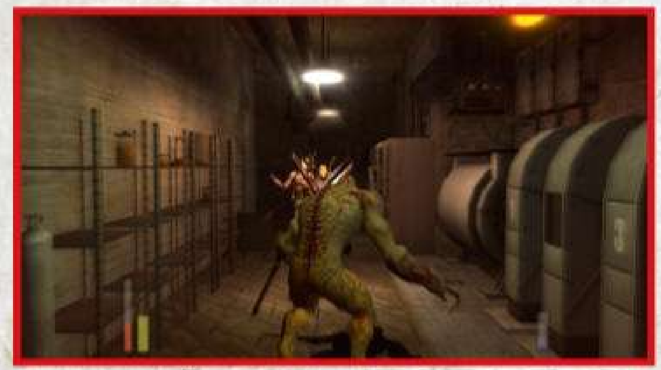
WORTH SUFFERING FOR

THE MECHANICS THAT MAKE THE SERIES WORTH PLAYING



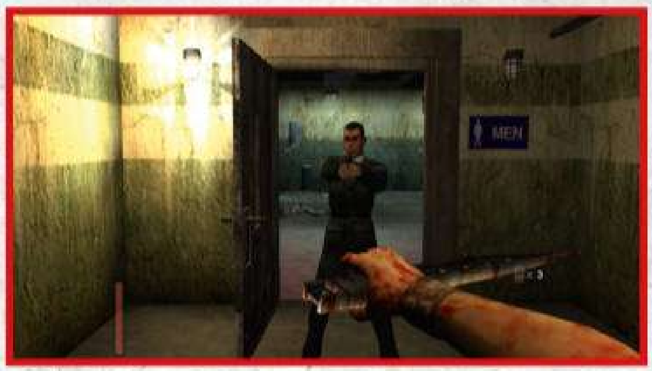
ITTY BITTY BITS

Conquering your demons sometimes means blowing them to pieces with a shotgun. *The Suffering*'s dismemberment system allowed players to reduce the limbs of creatures to little more than gory chunks. In true B-horror movie fashion, it would also liberally splatter the red stuff over the walls, floors and even Torque himself.



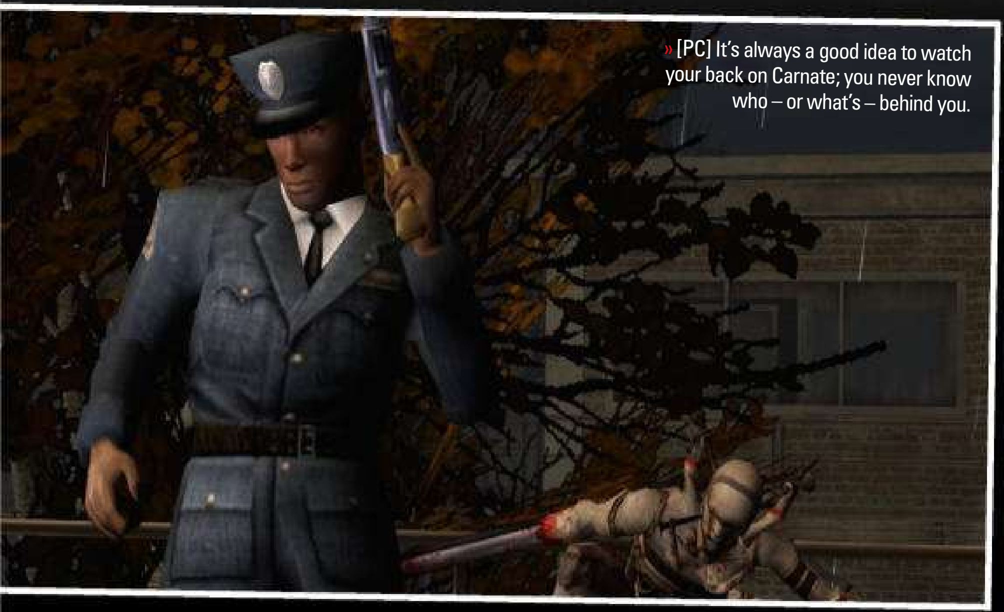
THE BEAST WITHIN

Torque's intense rage manifests itself as a hideous creature, capable of ripping monsters apart with ease. By killing enough enemies, players could fill up an insanity meter that would allow Torque to transform. Whether the creature actually existed outside of Torque's head was left up to the player to decide.



THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

Players had free rein on how they decided to interact with the various NPCs Torque came across during his journey. In such a dire circumstance, even the most unlikely of allies could be useful in fending off the malefactors. Caution was needed, however, not everyone you met was friendly.



» [PC] It's always a good idea to watch your back on Carnate; you never know who – or what's – behind you.

takes him through an abandoned asylum, a quarry, a cave system and a wrecked slave ship, amongst other places.

"The island was interesting because each element of it could have been a game in itself," remembers level designer Nathan Cheever. "Anything you could find in a horror environment, you could just pump right into this game, and then springboard off of that to find other things that would make it unique. That was exciting for me… because you could find inspiration in almost any sort of horror medium: movies, TV series, books, anything and pour it into this title."

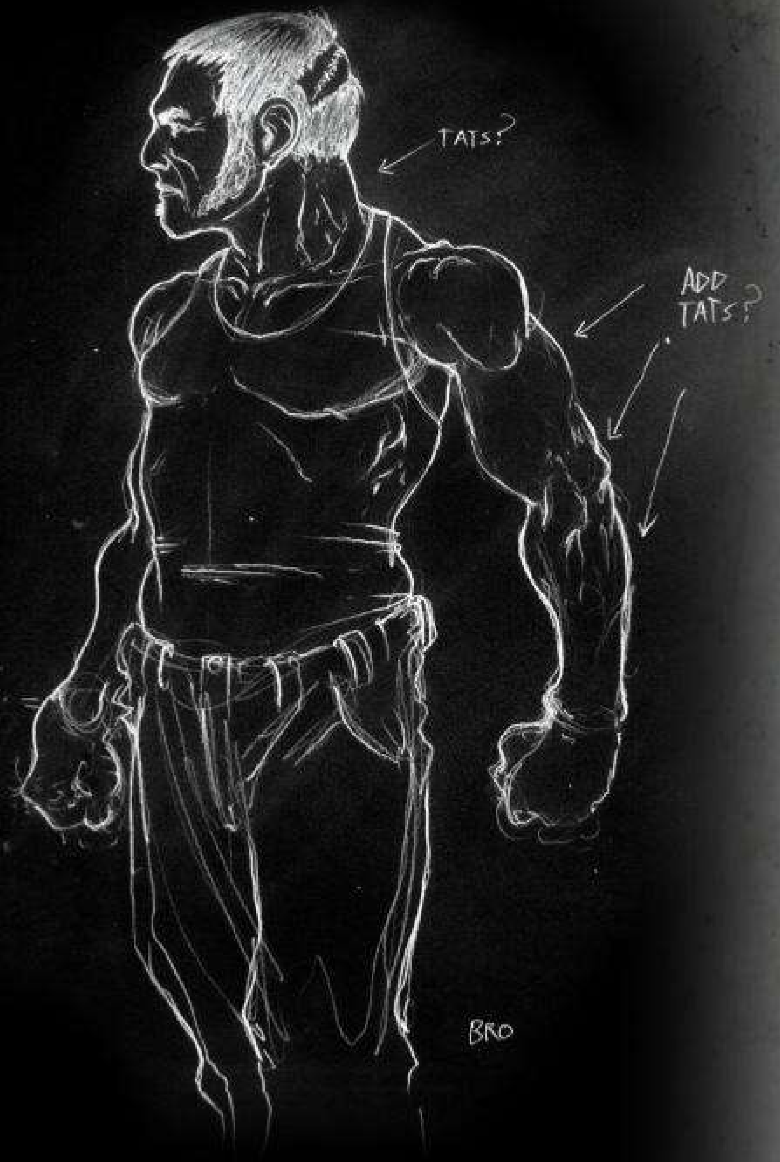
Amongst the game's major influences were famous psychological horror films, particularly *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *Ringu* and above all Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. Torque himself is no stranger to the torments of the mind. Having suffered from blackouts and bursts of uncontrollable rage all his life, he finds himself on Abbot after being convicted of murdering his wife and children during one of his fits. Whether he was actually guilty or not was up to the player. Torque meets several NPCs over the course of the game, whom players could choose to help, ignore or straight up murder. Which course they chose would determine the game's ending, of which there were three. As morality systems went it was a bit shallow, the lack of any plausible reason to murder NPCs making Torque come across as an amoral psychopath. Nonetheless, the multiple endings added to the game's replayability, and was a rare example outside of RPGs where the player could not only determine a protagonist's fate but their past as well.

The first *Suffering* sold sufficiently well that Surreal was tasked by Midway with making a sequel, *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*, which took Torque off of Carnate to his home city of Baltimore. As well as having to contend with another outbreak of monsters, Torque also found himself hounded by a sinister paramilitary group called The Foundation and a mysterious mob kingpin known only as Blackmore.

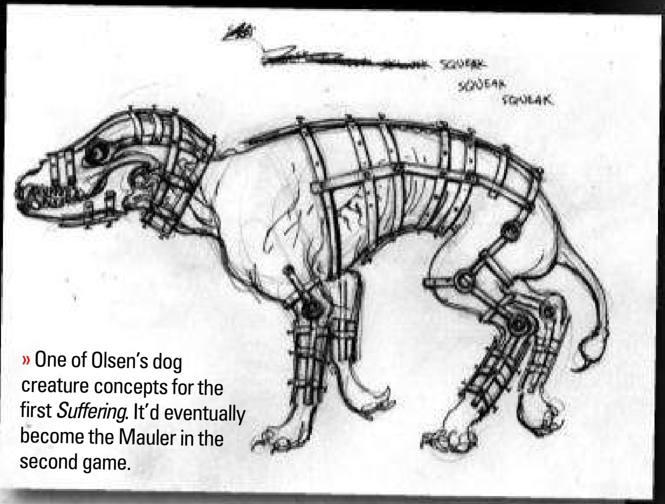
***Ties That Bind* made a number of improvements on the first title.** Visually, the game looked far superior to its predecessor, boasting some highly detailed environments that helped to sell the game's depiction of Baltimore's grimy, seedier side. Character details were sharper, animations smoother, and textures and lighting improved thanks to a robust set of tools created for Surreal's in-house Riot Engine. The quality enhancement was especially impressive as *Ties That Bind* was developed virtually from scratch, using totally overhauled animations and textures instead of old assets.

The game also changed and expanded on some of its predecessor's mechanics. It introduced a two-weapon limit to the character, largely as a result of the trend set by *Halo*, with a harness rig that displayed the weapons Torque was carrying. Most significant from a gameplay perspective was the fleshing out of Torque's insanity mode, so that both the appearance and abilities of his creature form would change depending on the player's moral choices. In addition to returning monsters, new creatures were introduced that played on themes of urban blight, such as the Gorgers (flesh-eating creatures representing hunger and malnutrition) and the Triggermen (gun-toting, spider-like corpses representing gang

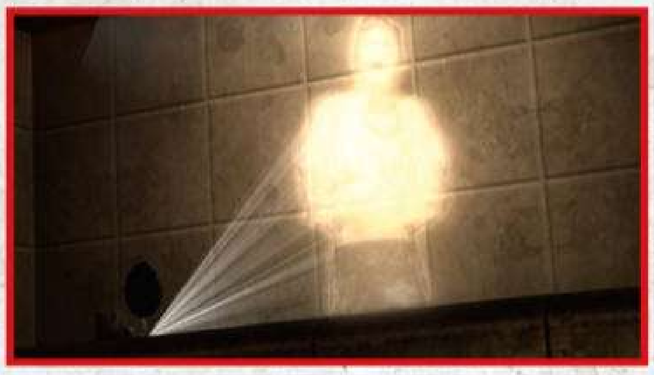
▶


TATS?
ADD TATS?
BRO

» The first ever drawing of Torque. Richard Rouse asked Olsen to draw a prisoner during the very early stages of the first *Suffering*'s development; this was the result. Rouse liked the design so much that it was chosen for the main protagonist; Torque's final in-game model was virtually unchanged from this sketch. Rouse has the original picture framed in his home to this day.

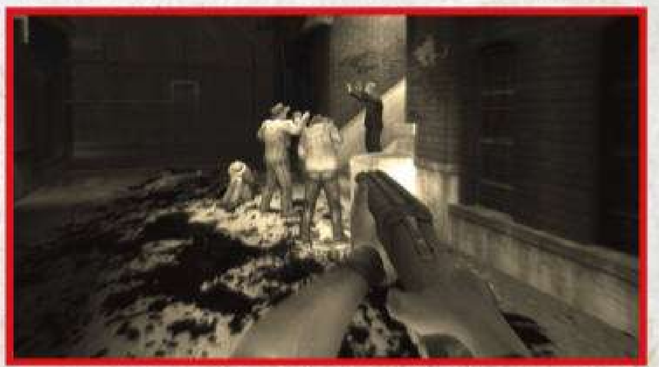


» One of Olsen's dog creature concepts for the first *Suffering*. It'd eventually become the Mauler in the second game.



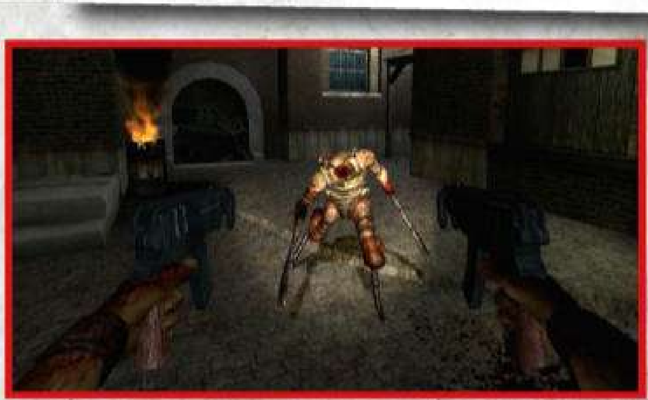
THE DOCTOR IS IN

One of the game's most memorable characters was the gleefully wicked Dr Killjoy. Given unholy life as an old-timey movie projection, this Vincent Price-like film phantom takes a particular interest in Torque, whom he considers an interesting specimen. Killjoy later follows Torque to Baltimore, intent on continuing his 'research'.



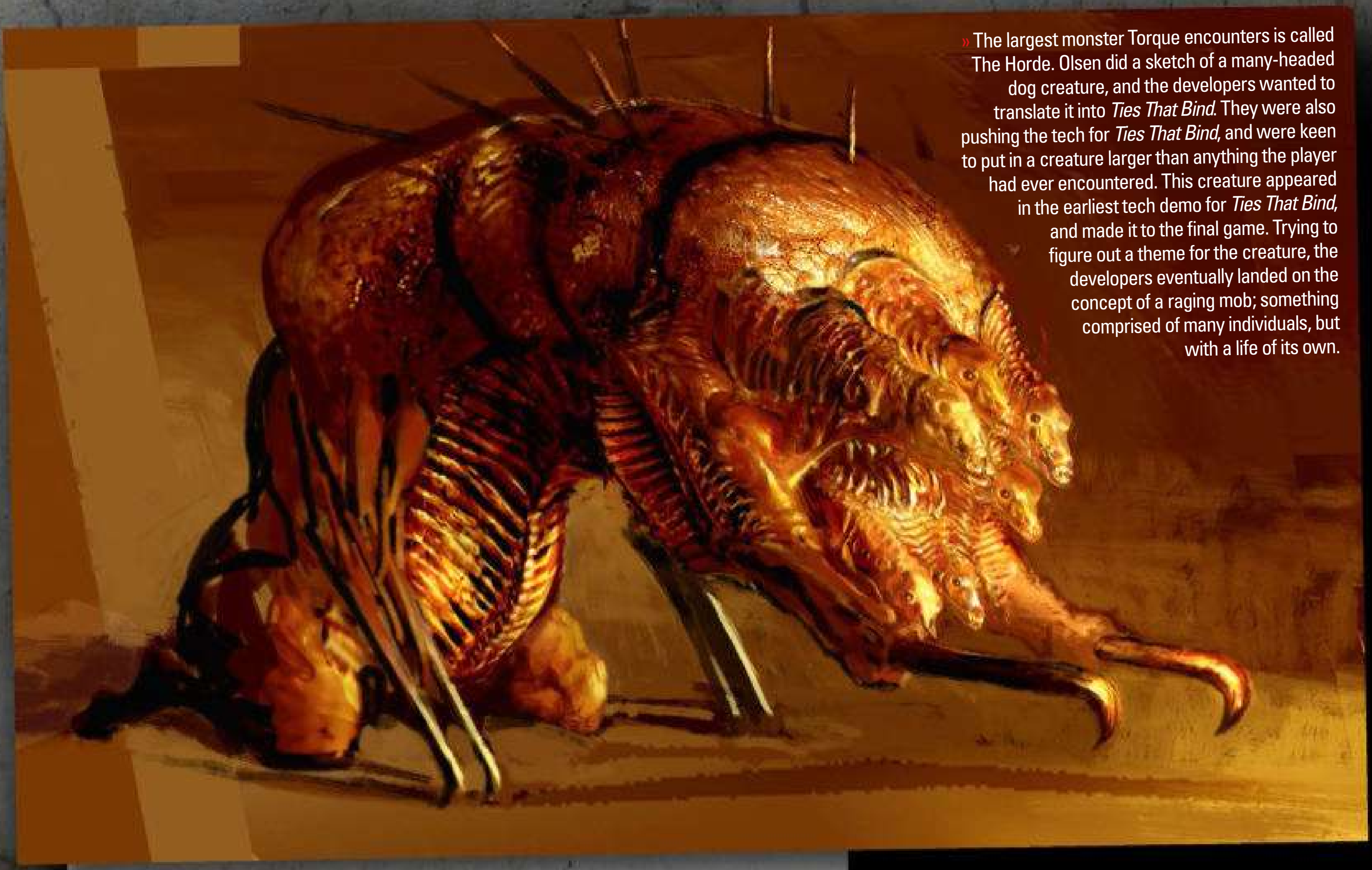
BLAST FROM THE PAST

Torque is not the only one with a dark history. As the cataclysm unfolds, the sins of Baltimore and Carnate's past are brought back to life once more. Torque will often be granted fleeting visions of these events, helping the player uncover the gruesome mysteries *The Suffering* has to offer.



ARMED TO THE TEETH

Surviving *The Suffering* is all about guns… lots of guns. Torque's arsenal includes a variety of deadly weaponry, from simple prison shivs and steel pipes all the way up to high-powered machine guns and rocket launchers. Torque can also dual-wield many weapons, letting him double the destruction.



» The largest monster Torque encounters is called The Horde. Olsen did a sketch of a many-headed dog creature, and the developers wanted to translate it into *Ties That Bind*. They were also pushing the tech for *Ties That Bind*, and were keen to put in a creature larger than anything the player had ever encountered. This creature appeared in the earliest tech demo for *Ties That Bind*, and made it to the final game. Trying to figure out a theme for the creature, the developers eventually landed on the concept of a raging mob; something comprised of many individuals, but with a life of its own.

violence). These were once again designed by Ben Olsen, and like the first *Suffering* were one of the game's highlights.

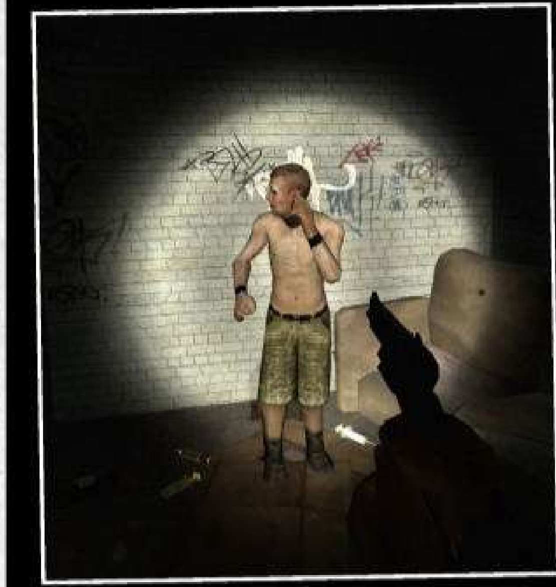
"My favourite monsters were the Maulers," recalls *Ties That Bind*'s producer Noah Heller, referring to a skull-headed canine-like enemy. "One of my first moments [at Surreal] was having Ben come up to me and saying, 'I have a passion to make dogs with human faces!' And I was like, 'Wow, what an interesting guy this is, that those should be the first words out of his mouth.' So the fact that the idea persisted into the game, and Ben's joy at seeing them get in, was a happy moment for me."

Other areas of *Ties That Bind* were something of a mixed bag. Due primarily to a lack of playtesting, some parts of the game suffered from unbalanced difficulty spikes, particularly several setpiece moments. Whilst the game featured many more weapons than the first *Suffering*, these too could be hit or miss (pun intended). For a linear shooter ammo was sometimes frustratingly scarce, and whilst some guns delivered on that ever-important sense of 'oomph' (the dual sawn-off shotguns being particularly satisfying to use) others felt underpowered and redundant.

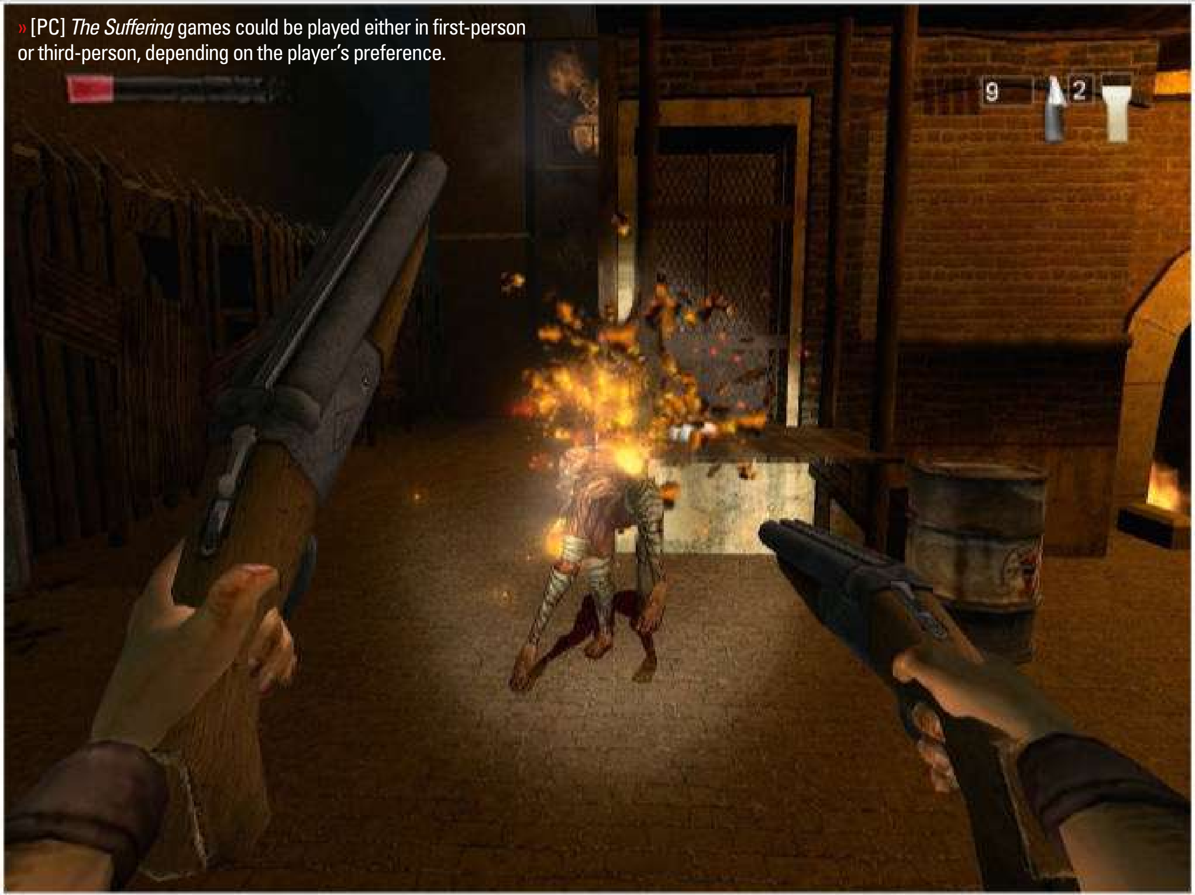
Similarly underwhelming were the Foundation's soldier enemies. Going toe-to-toe with *The Suffering*'s unique monsters was always one of the series' main draws, but in *Ties That Bind*, the player would frequently find themselves fighting these PMC goons just as often as they did the game's more supernatural foes. Though perfectly passable as enemies, their presence arguably took more from the game than it added; as Richard admits, they "kind of felt like they were from another game".

It was in the story department, however, that *Ties That Bind* fell shortest when compared to

"WE HAD A PLAN OF SHIPPING THE GAME IN A YEAR, AND THAT WAS CRAZY"
RICHARD ROUSE III



» [PC] *The Suffering* was not a series afraid of exploring some very dark subject matter, including drug addiction, misogyny and racism.



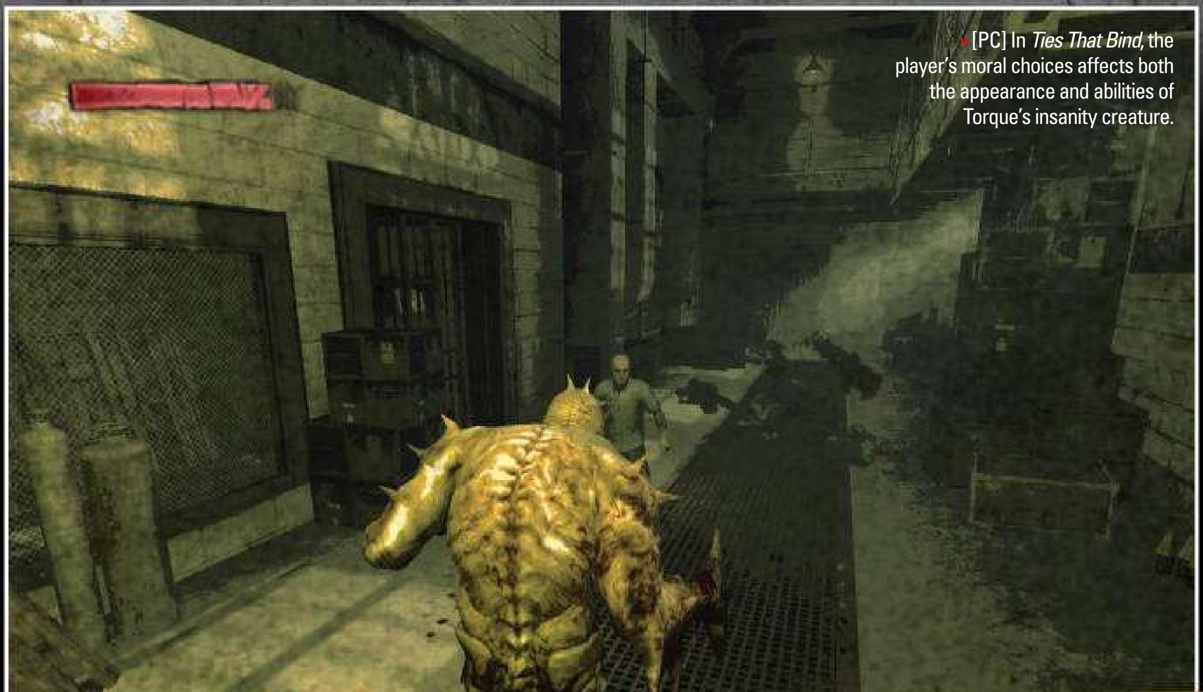
» [PC] *The Suffering* games could be played either in first-person or third-person, depending on the player's preference.

DECISIONS DECISIONS

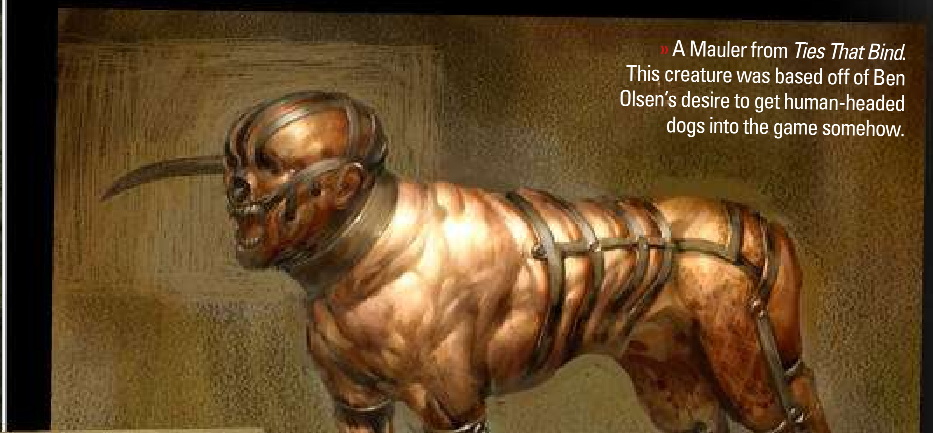
HOW MORALITY SHAPED SURREAL'S GAMES

Both *Suffering* games feature a morality system that not only determines Torque's future, but his past as well. In the first game, Torque cannot remember the night his family was murdered; what the player does in-game will reveal the extent of his innocence or otherwise. With *Ties That Bind* bringing Torque back to his home city, the morality system delved further into his family life prior to the night of the murder, particularly his relationship with his son Corey. In both games the player could determine whether Torque was saint or sinner by how they chose to deal with the various NPCs Torque encountered: save, ignore, or murder them.

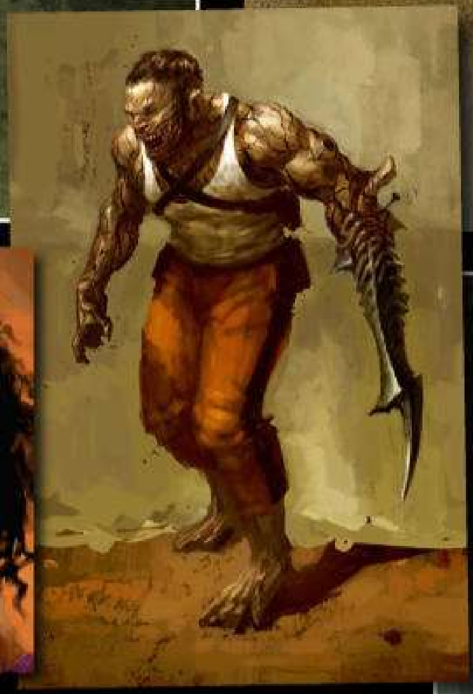
In the second game, Torque's creature would change its appearance and special attacks based on the player's moral standing. Cleverly, *Ties That Bind* would also adapt its content if the player had a previous save game file from the first game installed on their machine. As well as tailoring the opening cutscene, some NPCs would behave differently towards Torque depending on his actions on Carnate. Also affected was the second game's ultimate conclusion as *Ties That Bind* has no less than nine possible endings the player can achieve.

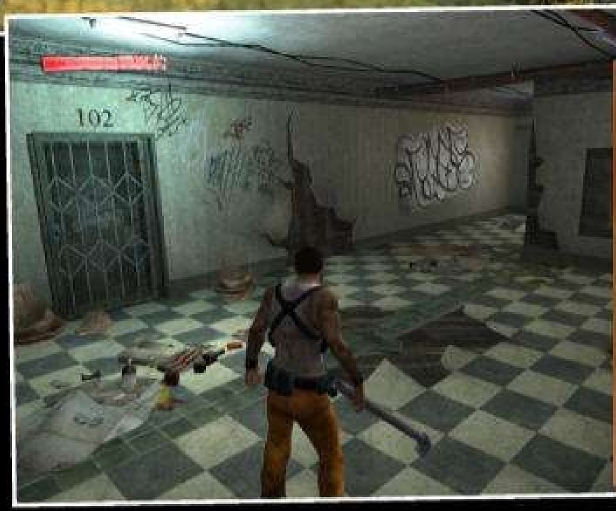


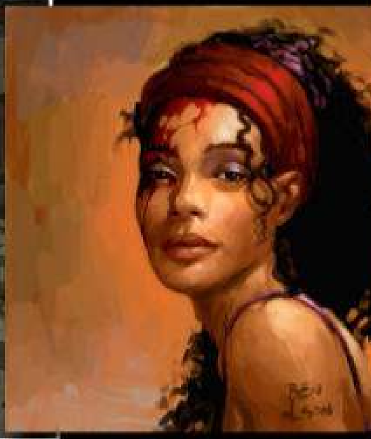
» [PC] In *Ties That Bind*, the player's moral choices affects both the appearance and abilities of Torque's insanity creature.



» A Mauler from *Ties That Bind*. This creature was based off of Ben Olsen's desire to get human-headed dogs into the game somehow.







» [PC] Welcome to Baltimore, Maryland. It's like a nicer version of [insert your most hated town here].

its predecessor. The beauty of the first game's setup lay in its simplicity, the concept of a prison overrun with monsters providing Torque with both a straightforward motivation (escape) and obvious obstacles preventing him from doing so. Thematically too the first game featured a strong core. At its heart it was a retelling of the classic haunted house story, exploring themes of a location corrupted by the sins of its past. Much like *The Shining*'s Overlook Hotel, Carnate itself was as much an actor as its inhabitants – a nameless, faceless malevolence unleashing its fury on those trapped within it.

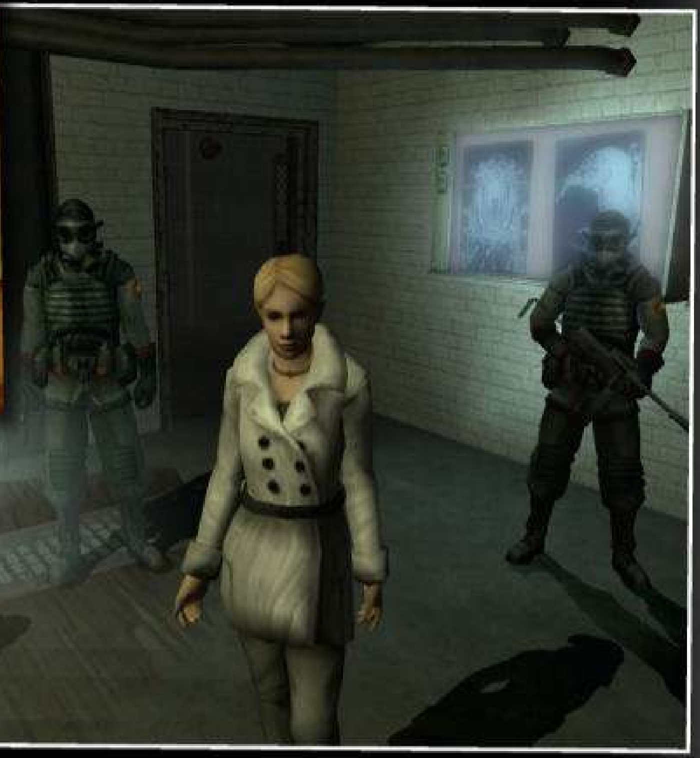
These advantages were lost when doing the sequel. Midway had acquired Surreal shortly after the release of the first *Suffering*, and had no interest in doing a sequel that didn't involve Torque. As players had already explored Carnate, it was decided early on that *Ties That Bind* would have to take place elsewhere, depriving it of the first game's strong central antagonist and much of its identity. Since Torque was the only connecting link between Carnate and Baltimore, it also meant that the explanation of how the monsters appeared in the city would have to involve him personally. In the first game, it is heavily implied that the monsters are direct manifestations of the many evils perpetrated on Carnate, with the arrival of someone as rage-filled as Torque being the final straw that breaks the camel's back. In the second game this idea was lost, replaced with a vague explanation for the creatures that sometimes felt convoluted and muddled.

Ditching Carnate and continuing Torque's story may not have been an insurmountable narrative challenge, but in hindsight its execution was likely complicated by several factors. For one thing, the developers had never planned for a sequel – Richard recalls a feeling of "waiting for [the first *Suffering*] to be cancelled the entire time" during its development – leaving very few plot threads for *Ties That Bind* to draw on. For another, the game was made in a much shorter period than the first, with little time spent on preproduction.

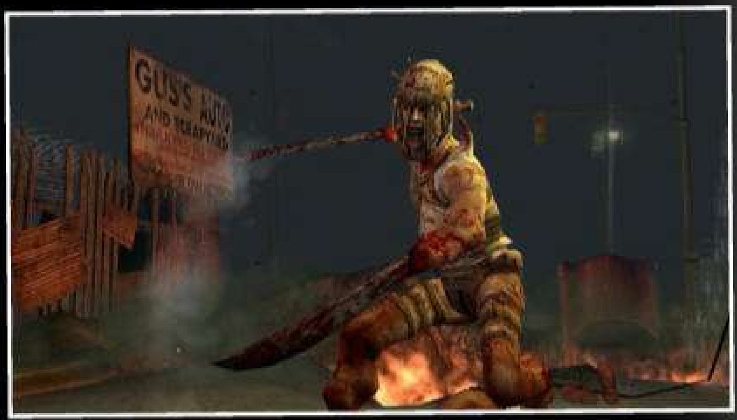
"We had a plan of shipping the game in a year, and that was crazy," remembers Richard. "And then it ended up being 16, then 18 months, which was also crazy. We shouldn't have made the game that quickly, either from a market standpoint or a development standpoint, and that sort of put us in a perpetual state of panic."

Despite its inconsistencies, *Ties That Bind* was generally well-received critically. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of the revenue it generated, and poor sales figures for it contributed to Midway announcing a $33 million loss in Q3 of 2005. Midway itself declared bankruptcy in 2009, and the rights for *The Suffering* IP were eventually acquired by Warner Bros, with whom they remain to this day. Although a sequel or remake remains unlikely, in 2017 both *Suffering* titles were released on GOG.com, showing that the series hasn't been entirely forgotten.

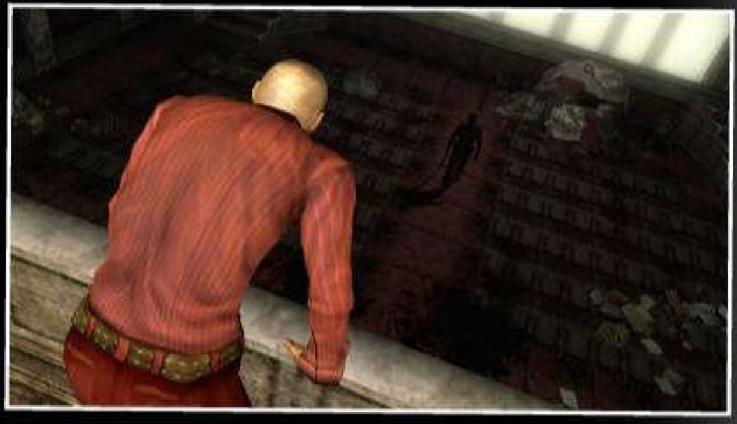
If you're interested in playing an early example of the horror genre's foray into action, or just want a more unusual shooter with some unique and creepy enemy types, both games are still worth checking out to this day. If you're a diehard horror nut, it'd be criminal not to. *



» [PC] Jordan is the head of a sinister organisation known only as The Foundation. Her exact motives are a mystery.



» [PC] The Slayer is *The Suffering*'s iconic creature. Representing death by beheading, these agile malefactors can walk on walls and ceilings.



» [PC] Torque is confronted by Blackmore, a drug kingpin whose origins are somehow connected to that of the creatures.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come

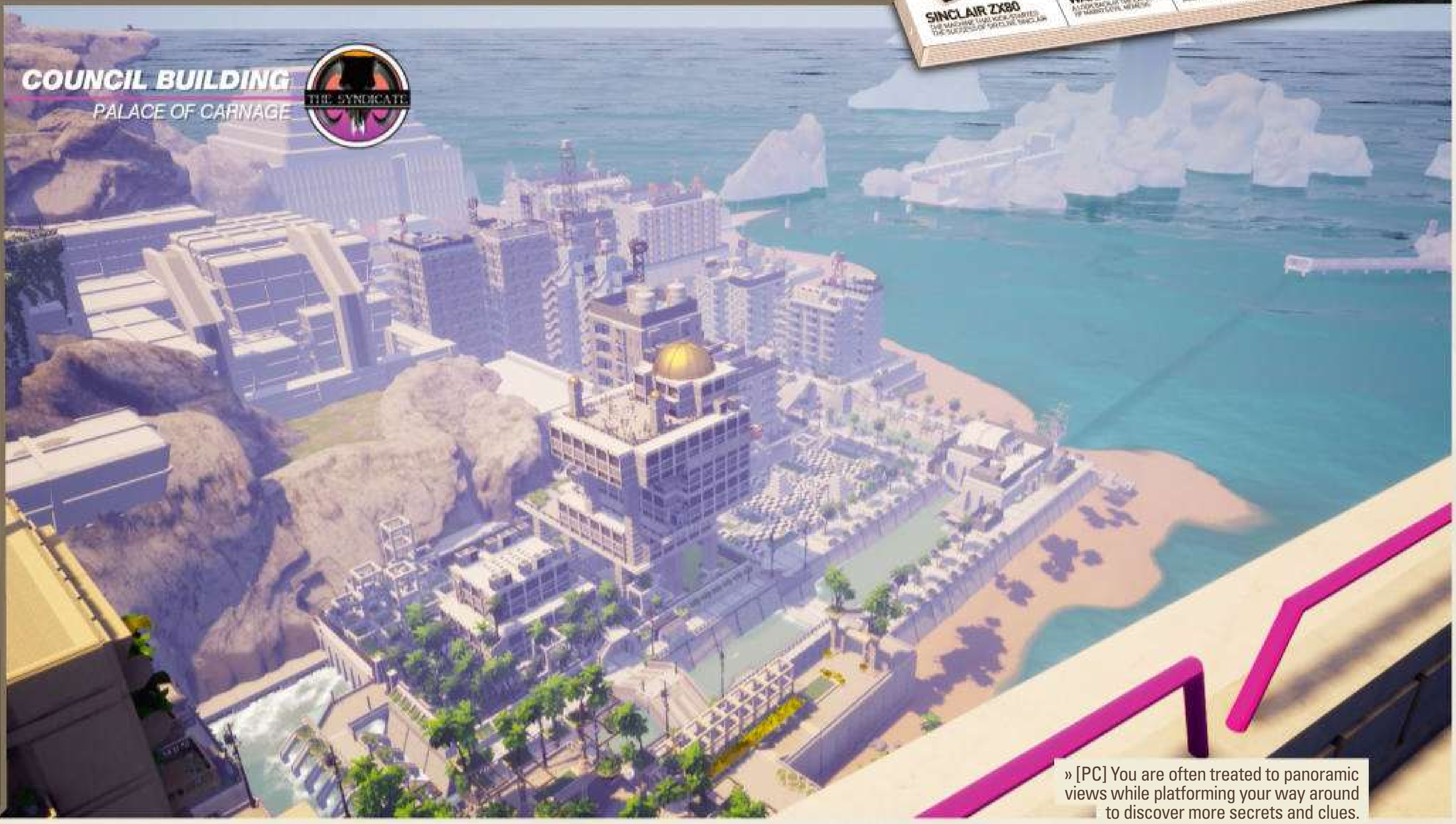
retro GAMER
PARADISE KILLER
IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER
SINCLAIR ZX80
WARIO
JOHN GIBSON
MYSTICAL NINJA

Info

- » **System:** PC
- » **Year:** 2020
- » **Publisher:** Fellow Traveller
- » **Developer:** Kaizen Game Works
- » **Key People:** Oli Clarke Smith, Phil Crabtree

Go Deeper

- » *Paradise Killer* began life as a walking sim where players would discover items on a deserted island, but investigative systems gradually took over and changed the direction of the game.
- » Developers Oli Clarke Smith and Phil Crabtree first met when they played together in a punk band in their younger days.



» [PC] You are often treated to panoramic views while platforming your way around to discover more secrets and clues.

Discover how bringing an open-world influence to a detective game set on a vaporwave island of dead-god worshipping immortals brings a whole new approach to the genre and creates an all-time great in the process

Words by Paul Walker-Emig

PARADISE KILLER

THE BACKGROUND

Paradise Killer is the debut game from Kaizen Game Works, an indie studio founded by Oli Clarke Smith, who has a background in AAA development at the likes of Supermassive Games, and Phil Crabtree, who previously spent his career primarily working on mobile titles. Their first effort as a studio doesn't *look* like a game that would be a big hit. That's not meant as an insult, rather an acknowledgement that *Paradise Killer* is distinct and unusual enough that it looks like a game more likely to fill a niche than to break out as an indie hit in the way that it did when it was released in September of 2020 and the high-scoring reviews started rolling in.

Pulling together disparate influences and styles that include hard-boiled detective fiction, Suda 51, Japanese visual novels and adjacent titles like *Danganronpa*, vaporwave, HP Lovecraft and Franz Kafka, *Paradise Killer* found a way to blend them together in a way that feels coherent and apparently struck a chord with fans that heartily sung the praises of the game and helped spread the word and contribute to the game's success.

THE GAME

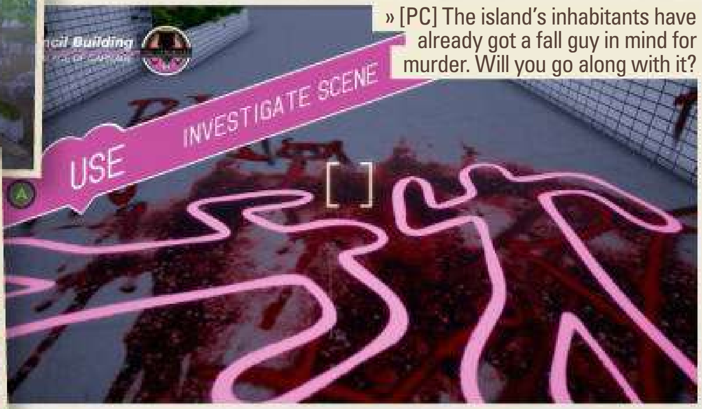
The first thing that strikes you about *Paradise Killer* is the way it looks. In the game's first area you are confronted by a bizarre architectural space that looks like it has been designed by a sentient Geocities page. That loud visual style is carried throughout the island on which the game is set, but those outlandish visual elements are offset by more mundane architectural forms – residential tower blocks, convenience stores and so on. It's an odd but effective mix of the alien and the everyday. This is something *Paradise Killer* is very good at – relishing its own outlandishness while still finding ways of connecting to real experiences and issues once you look below surface-level impressions.

Your job on the island is to solve a murder. To be precise, the apparent ritual murder of the whole of the ruling council that controls the island. You've been brought back from exile after three million days by the cabal of immortals left on the island, of which you were once a part, to clear this troubling mess up. The way this investigation pans out is one of the things that makes *Paradise Killer* stand out. Eschewing the linearity that typically characterises detective games,

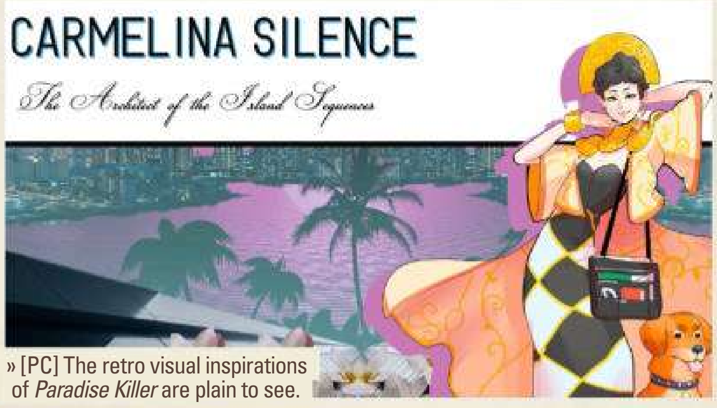
TALK
YURI NIGHT
Syndicate Apartments
24th Island Sequence
Breathing Life Back Into Paradise

Citizen Apartments

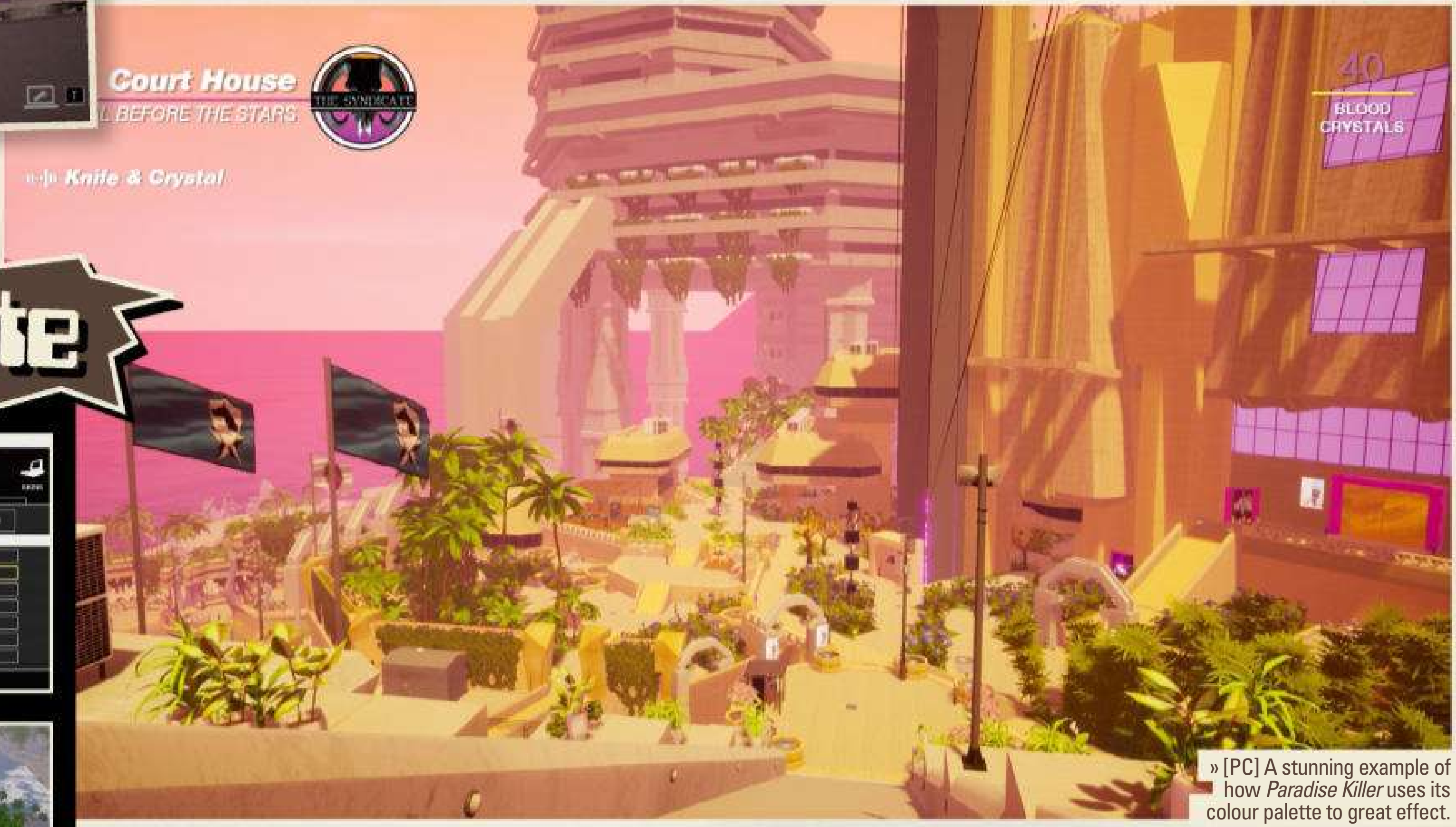
» [PC] Despite its outlandishness, *Paradise Killer*'s island is constructed to make some sense – there are places for people to live and work.



» [PC] The island's inhabitants have already got a fall guy in mind for murder. Will you go along with it?



» [PC] The retro visual inspirations of *Paradise Killer* are plain to see.



» [PC] A stunning example of how *Paradise Killer* uses its colour palette to great effect.

Things of note

SUMMER SOUNDS

The distinctive visual style of *Paradise Killer* is complemented by a fantastic retro-influenced jazzy soundtrack that vibes perfectly with the feel of the world.

SYNDICATE OS
INVENTORY
POPULATION
TIMELINE
MAP
CHOOSE NEW TRACK
KNIFE & CRYSTAL
PARADISE (STAY FOREVER)
LEAVING
END OF THE WORLD
LADY BLUE
NEON EYES

OPEN-ENDED

The way the game blends open-world sensibilities with investigation mechanics really makes it stand out from games that have come before.

SECRET SEARCHING

There's a lot of platforming to do for those of you who like your collectibles, with secrets hidden in every nook and cranny.

BUILDING UTOPIA

The rich backstory of the island the game is based on and the cult that runs it is as fascinating as it is surreal.

ECCENTRIC'S ISLAND

Paradise Killer is packed with delightfully strange characters with bizarre backstories and the kind of motivations that only a bunch of cult-worshipping immortals could have.

TALK
THE WITNESS TO THE END

Paradise Killer pitches itself as an open-world murder mystery. You go where you want, speak to who you want, when you want, and construct a theory behind what happened in any way you see fit.

That freedom extends to when you decide to end the game: the trial that concludes your investigation can be started at any time you choose, regardless of how much evidence you've collected.

Evidence is collected by talking to the island's inhabitants and gathering their testimonies, by finding clues in the game's world, and dealing with the odd puzzle or hacking minigame. These will open up new sub-stories and lines of inquiry that broaden out into a host of different mysteries that you can eventually tie back together with some investigative persistence before undertaking the game's final trial, where you can present your findings and make your argument for who you think is guilty.

Exploring the island and speaking to its inhabitants as you undertake your investigation is satisfying in the way you would expect from a good detective game, every key clue you get giving you the smug satisfaction of knowing you've got something on someone who has been lying to you and that you might be able to use that leverage to get something else you want. But you also get much more than that. Peeling back the layers behind the story of the island and its bizarre roster of inhabitants – with fantastic names like Crimson Acid, Doctor Doom Jazz and Lydia Day Break – takes you to places that are narratively and thematically interesting. Dead alien gods, living skeletons, sacrifice-fuelled failed utopias, exploitation, betrayal, conspiracy – this island has got it all.

This means that as you collect your evidence and constantly shift your perception of what is going on and who is involved based on the secrets every character tries to hide from you, you are also reinterpreting the nature of the world around you and your role within it. What exactly is this place? How does it function? Do you and your ex-comrades really have the moral authority to be meting out justice? Tying all this to a compelling murder mystery helps elevate *Paradise Killer* to the next level.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Paradise Killer's status as one of the greatest detective games of all time might be enough to enshrine it as a Future Classic alone. However, the game also has in its favour its aesthetic and formal innovation. While it has many clear influences, they have been pulled together in such a way as to create a game to which it is hard to find any clear comparison. Yes, you can identify a bit of *Danganronpa* here, a bit of vaporwave there, but there's still nothing else that quite feels like this as a whole. There's no other game that's tackled the detective genre in quite this way. That innovation stands the game in good stead to be remembered well into the future and may well have an impact on detective games to come. That will only further establish the significance of its legacy. *

> I wanted Nintendo to have millions of sound files
>
> **Charles Martinet**

» Charles was on fine form for our interview. We've used { } to highlight the many types of voices he used throughout our enjoyable chat.

In the chair with...

CHARLES MARTINET

Famous as the voice of Mario in over 150 games, Charles Martinet was already a successful voiceover actor before Nintendo came calling. Speaking to us from Italy, Charles reveals how those voices are recorded

Words by Andrew Fisher

"Hello to all my fans at Retro Gamer, it's-a-me Mario! Woohoo! Mamma mia, you number one. See you in my games!" Charles' introduction as Mario is lively and animated, and he keeps up the pace. "It's been one marvellous adventure after another," he says, also describing many of the Mario games he voiced. "I've always tried to make interesting characters, be loving and fun and joyful, and the comedy always comes back on them, it's just light and airy, never at somebody's expense. It's one of my most firm principles, comedy is never supposed to hurt, only to be joyful."

How did you get into acting and voiceover work?

I was studying political science at UC Berkeley, and I had the greatest professor. I went back for my final year, and I couldn't get into his class. I said, 'Fine, I will do what anyone would do, I QUIT. I'll go away and come back when I can take this class.' And a friend of mine said, 'Why don't you come and take an acting class from me?' And I said, 'There is absolutely no way, I'm way too shy.' And he says, 'Oh come on, you'll have fun, you don't have to do anything if you don't want to. Just go in, we'll go and have lunch at the student cafeteria where they are learning to become Michelin starred chefs.' And I said, 'Lunch?' That was it, the lunch got me. I enjoyed watching and listening to everyone, and then they said, 'Go ahead and learn a monologue.'

I was shaking like a leaf, but somehow I reached the end of it, and everyone politely clapped, as you do in acting class, and [my friend] Lester said, 'I want to know how it is you're the only person of all of us that wasn't nervous at all.' Whaaaat!

The reason I actually became an actor was failure. I started getting my confidence up, and they were auditioning for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was convinced that Oberon was the part for me. So, I studied and studied, I did everything to get this part. I knew I really did a spot-on audition, and I called Lester. He says, 'Charles, don't count your chickens before they hatch, this is college, and you never know what's going to happen.' I got nothing. I not only didn't get Oberon, I got nothing. And that failure is why I'm an actor. So that is what set the fire in me to become an actor, and then it's been 40 fantastic, fun, wonderful years, of joy and happiness, performing and learning the art, the craft of acting.

Where did you study?

I went to the Drama Studio of London, England – Sir John Gielgud was the patron, Peter Layton the creator and headmaster, really fantastic, and that was 1979-1980. I came back to the United States, did theatre for ten years, and then I felt I needed a break from theatre. The phone rang, there was a guy saying, 'Do you want to audition for a corporate video?' So, I went and auditioned for that, and found I was making more money doing a day of that than I made in a week of the theatre. So, I thought, 'I'm a corporate video actor!' And along came radio. I was doing a TV ad, and the producer at the end of the day said, 'Do you do voiceover?' I read it; it was ten seconds. I can't really remember, something like, 'Orchard Supply, the right item at the right price, right now.' And here's another 250 dollars, which is how much I had made for standing there for nine hours [on the TV ad], and I said, 'I'm a voice actor! {Mario} Yippee!'

How did you then become Mario?

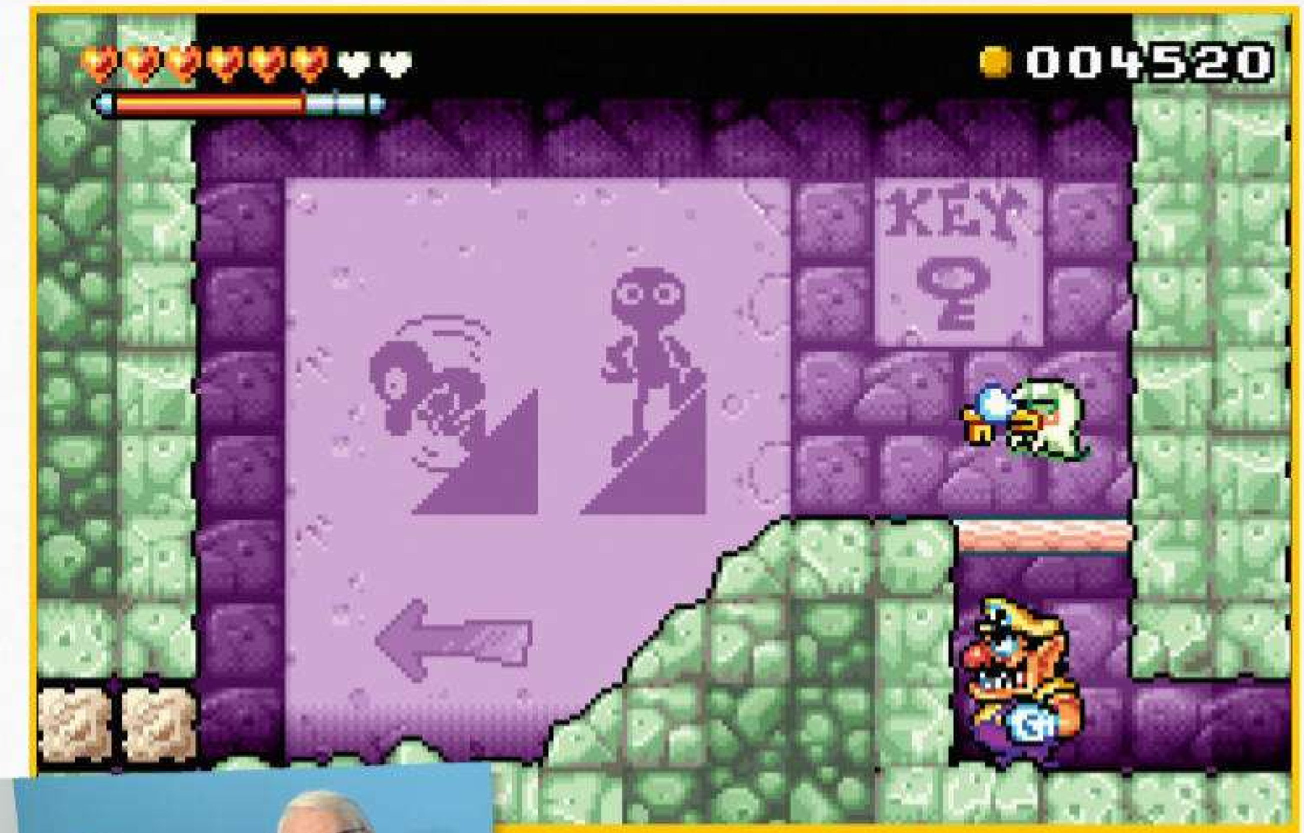
I just happened to be living the actor's life, sitting on the beach, waiting for my pager to go off 30 years ago, and it's a friend of mine. He says, 'Hey, you gotta go audition for this trade show you know, because I'm doing part of the show and you can be in it.' 'Wait a minute, you mean crash an audition? There's no way I would ever crash an audition,

▶

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **POLICE QUEST: OPEN SEASON** [1993] WINDOWS, MS-DOS, MACINTOSH - BILLY BOB, JANITOR
- **SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!** [1994] SNES – ANNOUNCER, REFEREE, BOXERS
- **MARIO'S GAME GALLERY** [1995] MS-DOS – MARIO
- **MARIO TEACHES TYPING** [1995] MS-DOS, WINDOWS (CD-ROM VERSION) – MARIO
- **SOLAR ECLIPSE AKA TITAN WARS** [1995] SATURN – SPINNER
- **SPACE QUEST 6** [1995] MS-DOS - RAY TRACE, PiTOOIE
- **SUPER MARIO 64** [1996] N64 – MARIO, BOWSER'S LAUGH, BOOS
- **MARIO PARTY** [1998] N64 – MARIO
- **THE CLUEFINDERS MATH ADVENTURES** [1998] WINDOWS, MACINTOSH –THE GUIDE
- **CARMEN SANDIEGO'S GREAT CHASE THROUGH TIME** [1999] WINDOWS, MACINTOSH –WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
- **SLAVE ZERO** [1999] WINDOWS – OLD ONE, SANGONAR
- **SPAWN** [1999] GAME BOY COLOR – CLOWN, THE CURSE
- **STAR WARS: X-WING ALLIANCE** [1999] WINDOWS – ADMIRAL HOLTZ, REBEL PILOT
- **RISING ZAN: THE SAMURAI GUNMAN** [1999] PLAYSTATION – MASTER SUZUKI
- **MARIO TENNIS** [2000] N64 – MARIO, LUIGI, WARIO, WALUIGI, BABY MARIO
- **SKIES OF ARCADIA** [2000] DREAMCAST –VIGORO (ENGLISH DUB)
- **FOREVER KINGDOM** [2001] PS2 – DARSUL (ENGLISH DUB)
- **WARIO LAND 4** [2001] GAME BOY ADVANCE –WARIO
- **LUIGI'S MANSION** [2001] GAMECUBE – LUIGI, MARIO, BOOS, BOOLOSSUS
- **CEL DAMAGE** [2001] – FOWL MOUTH, FLEMING, BRIAN THE BRAIN, FLEMING'S FRIEND
- **MAD DASH RACING** [2001] XBOX – SPANX, ASH
- **SHADOW OF MEMORIES** [2001] PS2, XBOX, WINDOWS – HOMUNCULUS
- **JET SET RADIO FUTURE** [2002] XBOX – GOUJI ROKKAKU
- **SHINOBI** [2002] PS2 – ADDITIONAL VOICES (ENGLISH DUB)
- **WARIO WARE, INC: MEGA MICROGAMES!** [2003] GAME BOY ADVANCE –WARIO (UNCREDITED)
- **GLADIUS** [2003] GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX – ADDITIONAL VOICES
- **THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING** [2003] GAMECUBE, PS2. XBOX – EASTERLINGS
- **SUPER MARIO BALL** [2004] GAME BOY ADVANCE – MARIO, BOOS
- **THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE** [2004] – EAODEN, GIMLI
- **VIRTUA QUEST** [2005] GAMECUBE, PS2 – ANNOUNCER, SNAKE EYES, LAU CHAN, SHUN DI (ENGLISH DUB)
- **SUPER PAPER MARIO** [2007] WII - MARIO, LUIGI
- **MARIO PARTY DS** [2007] DS – MARIO, LUIGI, WARIO, WALUIGI
- **KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN** [2007] WINDOWS, PS3, XBOX 360 – THE ELDER BROTHER, VAULTBREAKER
- **HELLBOY: THE SCIENCE OF EVIL** [2008] PS3, PSP, XBOX 360 – ADDITIONAL VOICES
- **WARIO LAND: SHAKE IT!** [2008] WII - WARIO
- **RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: A CRACK IN TIME** [2009] PS3 – ORVUS
- **RESONANCE OF FATE** [2010] PS3, XBOX 360 – CARDINAL LAGERFELD (ENGLISH DUB)
- **THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM** [2011] WINDOWS, PS3, XBOX 360 – PAARTHURNAX
- **RUNNER2** [2013] VARIOUS – NARRATOR
- **MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOM BATTLE** [2017] SWITCH – MARIO, LUIGI
- **LUIGI'S MANSION 3** [2019] SWITCH – LUIGI, MARIO
- **HIGH SCORE** [2020] NETFLIX – NARRATOR
- **SUPER MARIO 3D ALL-STARS** [2020] SWITCH - MARIO



» [GBA] The Hall Of Hieroglyphics acts as a clever tutorial level in *Wario Land 4*.

» Charles received a Guinness World Record for voicing Mario in over 100 games.

» [PC] The dragon Paarthurnax, as voiced by Charles in *The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim*.

» [PC] The voice of Paarthurnax returned for the *Skyrim* table in Zen Pinball's Bethesda bundle.

I am a professional actor… Where should I go?' I left that beach, I went to this audition. As I was walking in the door, the producer was walking out and the cameraman behind him with the case. And I said, 'Hi, can I read for this part?' And he signs and goes, 'OK. Alright, we'll set the camera back up, come on in. You're an Italian plumber from Brooklyn named Mario, for this company Nintendo, it's a videogame character. We're going to create a real-time animation system so you will talk as this character, and the audience will see the character. But you'll have a hidden camera, hidden microphone. We're gonna call it *MIRT*, like *Mario In Real Time*. So, make up a voice, make up a videogame, make up anything you want, I don't care, just carry on until you run out of things to say.'

I'm literally thinking, 'OK, videogame {Pac-man} Wakka wakka wakka. How do you make up a videogame? Italian plumber from Brooklyn? {Rough voice} Hey, get outta my face, I'm working 'ere. I don't want to do that, because if I did that for nine hours a day, it would be horribly unhappy and negative and what if there are children?' So, I had done Gremio in *Taming Of The Shrew* a few years before. 'I know, I'll do Gremio. {Italian accent} A nice Italian guy, you know? Like this, I'll make it younger, I'll just make up things about food.' And I heard 'ACTION!' I said {Mario} 'Hello, I'm-a-Mario, let's make a pizza pie together. You get some sausage, I will get some spaghetti. And then I chase you with the pizza, and if I catch you with the pizza, you gotta eat de pizza.' He didn't say cut, so I said {Mario} 'And then, we're gonna make lasagne, and I'm gonna chase you around and then you're gonna chase me.' And he never said stop, so I kept going through every pasta I have ever heard of, and then I started making pasta up [until] I finally heard, 'Stop talking, cut, there's no more video tape. Stop, thank you, we'll be in touch.' And I was for sure that was the end, I would never hear another word. I went back to the beach, watched the sunset, went to dinner with my friend. He got on the phone, he called Nintendo, 'I've found our Mario, we've got him.'

» Mario and Charles backstage at GamesCon in 2017.

> “I can’t imagine a more fulfilling career than the one I am having”
>
> Charles Martinet

And that was 30 years ago, we went and did the show, it was supposed to be a one-off. We had so much fun, that it ended up being two and then four and over and over again. When the Nintendo 64 was about to come out, I was doing *Mario In Real Time* and making the press announcements. And we were doing all kinds of events with Mario and one day the phone rang. ‘Mr Miyamoto would like you to play Mario in a game.’ I think I said, ‘Woohoo!’ And that was *Mario 64* in 1996, which is 25 years ago, which is just incredible.

How do you prepare for a recording session?
That’s a great question. These characters for me are always there. I mean, I dream as Mario, flying over these lakes or over the ocean, in the moonlight, a little bit *Galaxy*-esque. And I sometimes dream in 2D. If I wake up in the morning and I’m having a lousy day, I’m like {Wario growl}. These voices are just alive in me, along with {sings the *Super Mario Bros* start jingle} {Mario} Go! So, there’s not a lot of preparation [for Nintendo].

Now, I was doing this wonderful documentary for Netflix called *High Score*. For that, it’s just trying to get that first launch place, understand where you’re going for the transitions, and then get to the end. Try to be natural, try, try, try, try… and then when you get to the session, throw it all out the window and just be in that moment. You just have to think it or feel it and that’s enough. Whereas in videogames and cartoons, it’s gotta be bigger. It always has to be truthful, yourself as that character and forgetting all the lessons, all the observations and the rhythms and the paces, just being in that moment. {Drawl} So when you’re playing that character and being it, {normal} and once you let go, at the beginning you might be thinking he’s got beady eyes and a big jaw {Wario} or a big jaw and big eyes {normal} you make a decision and then, it’s time to be in the sandbox with my shovel and my pail and I’m just going to make my little castle.

Of course, as an actor I’m always drinking water, hydrating, making sure my vocal cords are well hydrated and able to do the ranges that I wanted.

Did you enjoy narrating *High Score*?
That was really fun. I also learned a lot about games. I met Nolan Bushnell, he’s a brilliant guy. And I met some of the people in there, and I didn’t know the way it all hinged together, I learned so much doing that, and I just wanted to do more. I’m ready for the next documentary series.

When you get a videogame script to record, is it different from your other forms of voiceover work?
We actually have scripts you know! With something like Paarthurnax {dragon} ‘What brings you to The Throat Of The World?’ You actually have to learn dragon speech; the writers created a language for dragons speaking. So, you do study your script as much as you can. And then for me, I make a living improvising. I start thinking of my improv as soon as I do the one version that’s exactly as written, and I’m immediately thinking what else I can do. I will mark all over the script, what it is that I want to try that’s different, so I don’t forget. And then once I start improvising, I then just take it off the page and start playing and be playful. I wanted Nintendo to have millions of sound files, I think by now they’ve got them! I’m the sort of actor, we’re going to do three versions, one exactly like this, and that’ll be our take. I’ll start with those three and then do another nineteen more till the director goes, ‘OK, stop, we’ve got it.’ ‘Can I try one more thing?’ Oy!

So, which dialogue took you the most takes?
Mario Strikers took some takes because it was so much more {vocals} Yahh! Whurr! And I also remember *Super Mario 3D World*, with the cats – {Cat Mario} Meow. At first, I thought it was going to be like {small meows} a little more {louder MEOW}, {MEEEOOWW}, that’s the one. It’s always that exploration, that’s the fun. So much fun.

So, on a typical recording day, how long will you be in the studio?
It all so much depends… because I’ve recorded two weeks… actually, one week before a game came out, and I’ve recorded three years before a game came out. And I’ve recorded an hour, and I’ve recorded 20 hours. So, it really depends on the game, and what’s coming next. I love *Super Mario Odyssey*, that was so fun. {Ribbit} The characters change and switch, you ▶

IT’S-A-ME, CHARLES

Five games voiced by Mr Martinet

SUPER MARIO 64

N64, 1996

■ An evergreen classic now remastered in HD, *Super Mario 64* stands out for the transition to 3D platforming and Charles’ fantastic vocalisation. The face on the title screen mimics *Mario In Real Time* with Silicon Graphics’ power, while Mario lying down to sleep is a superior idle animation to tapping a foot, OK Sonic fans?

MARIO TENNIS

N64, 2000

■ The start of the sports franchise, the original *Mario Tennis* keeps the gimmicks for the Ring challenges (pictured) and Bowser’s Court (with additional power-ups to hamper your seething opponent). It plays a good game of tennis too, and introduced the videogaming world to the purple long-legged legend that is Luigi’s nemesis, Waluigi.

WARIO WARE, INC: MEGA MICROGAMES!

Game Boy Advance, 2003

■ If you have never played a *Wario Ware* game, rectify that to enjoy many clever minigames. Many pay tribute to Nintendo’s heritage, such as the pictured Stomp! with Wario flattening Goombas. The original remains incredibly playable, with the bursts of action perfectly suited to playing on a handheld.

You got a Star!

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Wii, 2007

■ The gravity-defying antics of Mario (here shown remastered in HD for Switch) make for a wonderful entry in the series. Much like *Sunshine* before it, the control methods and objectives change regularly to keep things fresh – and flying around to tackle the innovative bosses feels liberating.

BIT.TRIP PRESENTS… RUNNER2: FUTURE LEGEND OF RHYTHM ALIEN

Various, 2013

■ The sequel to the original *Bit.Trip Runner* has cameos from gaming characters and sweet rhythm-action platforming. Hidden retro challenges and alternative routes make it repayable, and Charles’ hilarious narration is brilliant.

know. From the moment I saw Cappy I knew this game is going to be magical. I couldn't understand at first, what you mean you throw it and become that? And then you see the dinosaur and you're like, 'Oh, I have it, this is going to be fun.' [Laughs] It's never a challenge, you know. That's why, to me, when you get to the studio, you're in play mode – because you are in love with the character. Whatever it is, whether it's the eagle, dragon…

You know, the evil character never thinks he's evil. He only sees life from his eyes, and so you just play that moment and just let it come out. One day I went into a studio and there was this gorgeous character Wario. {Wario} Have a rotten day! [blows raspberries]. There it is, we want you to do that voice. One day I went in, and it was Luigi. One day it was Luigi and Mario talking, {Luigi} Do do dot do do do do dayo {Mario} Oh gee, wat a doot do dot Italia. And then one day, for [*Mario*] *Tennis*, and I was like {Waluigi} Waaaaaah, it was Waluigi.

It's just been one wonderful gift after another, and of course {Baby voices} Baby Luigi and Baby Mario, let's go! One beautiful gift after another of playfulness, and joy.

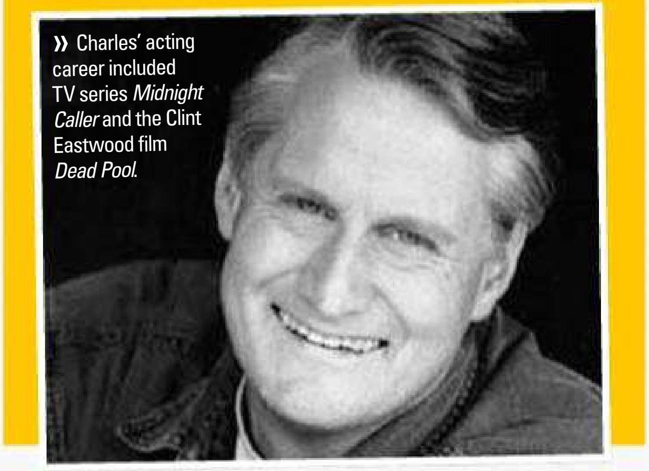
» [Switch] The cute Bee Mario ready to take on a boss in *Super Mario Galaxy*.

THE OLD DAYS

"It was always done with a handshake and an okey-dokey, you know," explains Charles. "You're in a session and somebody says, 'Do you do a Russian accent?' {Russian accent} But of course I do a Russian accent. 'Great, come back Tuesday, are you free?' All sorts of ways of getting cast.

"Back before I was doing Mario, I think I did at least another hundred videogames. Some were full dialogue; some were no dialogue. The first was some sort of tank commander game. I had to die a hundred different ways, back when the memory chips were small and it was like one byte, so you go. {Ehhh!} That was too long {Eh!} That's better. {Uhhh!} that was long, make it shorter. {Uh!} That's better, that's better. Ahh, my shoulder {Ah!} My leg! {Ooh!} My pelvis {Oof!}

"Nowadays, if you audition for something you sign a non-disclosure [agreement] very, very often. Careers are lost when people fail to adhere to it. 'I got this audition for this company, wow, it's incredible!' Boom, they might never work again. You have to be aware that the camera's always on, the microphone's always on. You have to be very careful."



» Charles' acting career included TV series *Midnight Caller* and the Clint Eastwood film *Dead Pool*.

Do you get to see much footage of the characters, or images, before you voice them?
Great question! Sometimes I see tremendous amounts, and other times I see nothing. The wonderful thing is, all these years of working with the people at Nintendo, we have so much trust in each other it doesn't matter where the idea comes from. It's all exploration and playing, and the texture comes out. What if I try this? We pass on all that we gather to the producers and directors, and then we get feedback, and we do more like that, more like this and then it's a fun dance of discovery. And I never know exactly where it's going.

I'm a big believer in making your decisions early, and then you're playing, you're dancing in the studio. You just make sure that you always maintain the thread. Every character goes through a transition arc, there's fundamentals, there's core belief, and so I make those decisions early on so that once I'm in the studio I'm living by that standard and play in that ballpark. The emphasis is on the play, by the way.

What would you say is your most memorable recording session?
I love every one for so many different reasons. But since I've been doing Mario… there were two that were really amazing. *Mario Teaches Typing* was one amazing thing. It was a lot of dialogue. On the show floor I was playful, joyful, a little bit this, a little edge in there, everything was playing around and having fun… but in *Mario Teaches Typing*, when I was dealing with children learning something, I read the script and I saw negatives – like, 'Oh that wasn't very good, try again,' or 'that was a failure'. Then I said, 'What if my character never says no, or is never negative, never 'that was a failure' – what if instead it's like 'great try', 'let's do it again, I know you can do better' {Mario} 'Oh, that was great, now let's do it again' or 'Not as good this time, but you're gonna do it better this time, let's go!'

Creating that dynamic of positive energy and positive influence, to me the character is always love, always respect, always a joy. Even in the fear, the terror, the adventure, all of that, it always still had to have that vibrancy, that alive spirit of pure joy and pure love. So that taught me something, when, 'Mr Miyamoto would like you to play Mario in a game,' and *Mario 64* came along, I had five years plus of the great invention and what I was going to do in my mind to put into the game. We were like a little intrepid expedition here, {Mario} whoa whoa whoa. Now what happens if you fall on the thing, something like it's, ah, {Mario falling} Waaaaaaah! That was such a playful, fun exploration.

PLAYER SELECT
MARIO
LUIGI
PEACH
TOAD
YOSHI
D.K.
WARIO
BOWSER

» [N64] Charles has been part of the *Mario Kart* games since the N64 days.

» [Switch] Surfing on a Koopa shell in *Super Mario 64* is a lot of fun

But then each one. *Galaxy.* {Mario} Yay! Just the joy, the thrill of that flying, and the fun. And then *Odyssey.* Oddly enough, it was like a tribute to the past and the future, it was wonderful. And like, *Sunshine.* Those are my favourite games, times five or so, *Super Mario 64* for that first experience of being in there, and *Galaxy. Mario Kart* was another one. *Sunshine*, where we were gaining our footing on how to keep that character really going in that exploration and joy. So those two games started it, and *Odyssey* is such a continuation. The new, the magical, the fun.

Are things very different now from when you started?
It's been quite a progression, from the tiniest amount to as much as they want. [See The Old Days boxout] It's a great piece of Nintendo, that Mario's been around for so many years because the elements are always new and always reliably the same.

You know, all new and all the same, the music is always fun, the character traits are always there, the love, joy, the happiness, the fun, {Mario} Wheehee! Owowowow! Those things are there but then also the new power-up, the new adventure, the Cappy

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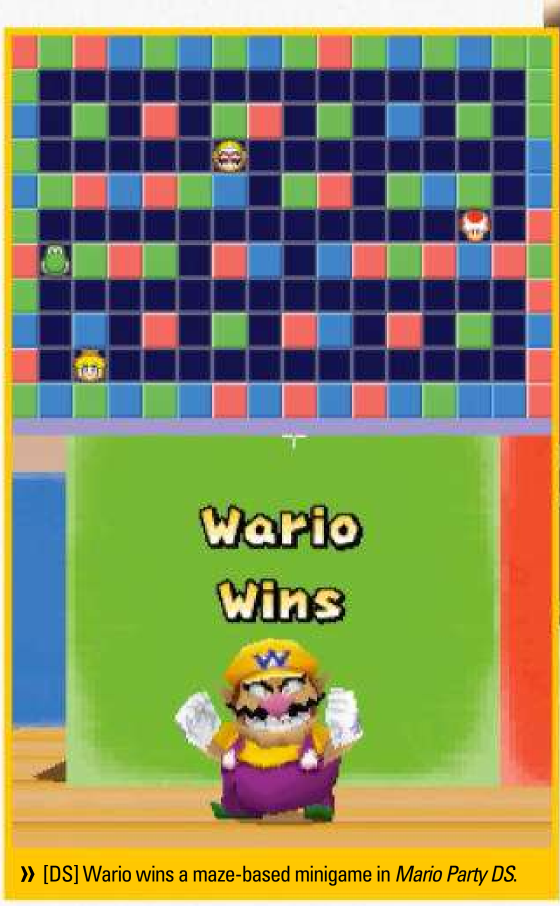
B

» [GBA] Defeating Petey Piranha in the much-maligned but enjoyable *Super Mario Ball*.

» Charles takes on Mario at Switch game ARMS during the Oz Comic Con, 2017.

> "The gamer is number one and the rest of us are just trying to have fun"
>
> Charles Martinet



» [DS] Wario wins a maze-based minigame in *Mario Party DS*.

in the world, the Cat, the things that always surprise the gamer. And I think that's the key, the gamer is number one and the rest of us are just trying to have fun making that fun.

What are your favourite characters?
Oh, yes. Mario, Luigi, Wario, Waluigi, Baby Mario and Baby Luigi. [Laughs] In the known universe.

Is there a character you would like to voice?
You know, I am so happy. I have been given so many beautiful gifts. Of course, I want to play ALL the parts, all the time. But you know, I can't imagine a more fulfilling, joyful, fun time and fun career than the one I am having.

You've been to many conventions and trade shows, what have been your favourites and what made them special?
Oh gosh, I loved the launch in London of *Odyssey*. That was such a joy, such a pleasure, so many people playing that game. I was also in London for the launch of *Mario Maker*, and being in a room with a bunch of pros, as they competed against each other, that was incredible.

They made levels that were so hard, you had three chances to get by the first obstacle. OK, somebody made it past that first one and then by osmosis, the next person knew how to get past that one, but not to get past the next one. And then it just kept going. And then the guy that created that level did it, and it was like {cheers} Yaaaah! My version of a level is like, I make it so you can't possibly die. So, there's no holes, you go {spring} Boing, boing {Mario} beedeebeedeebee, I put coins in every single slot and then everybody wins, it's just like life (laughs).

File
Options
Help
MARIO
BOOKS 3
CARDS 0
Andrew
BOOKS 6
CARDS 3
Oh, you're so good!

» [DOS] *Mario's Game Gallery* (aka *Mario's FUNdamentals*) includes card game *Go Fish*.

» [Switch] The impassive Luigi stare as he overtakes Mario in a replay from *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe*.

Are there any organisations you've been able to help through your work?
I love all the charities that Nintendo supports, like the Make-A-Wish Foundation, just wonderful people. I'm always happy to contribute to anything that brings fairness and equality to the world.

Brilliant to talk to you Charles.
{Mario} Thank you so much, see you next time! *

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Readers can get involved at www.retrogamer.net/forum

DRS: If Nintendo ever decided to produce a *Mario* game aimed at a more mature audience, would you be comfortable making Mario swear?

Oh, that's so funny. You know, for me, it's the purity, the joy, I try to be the same way on my Facebook and my Twitter, my Instagram, that it's friendly for everybody all the time. It's the integrity of that character and of the games, that kids get that incredibly loving, caring, play.

RichL: Has Nintendo copyrighted the character voices so you cannot use them in certain circumstances?

We have a relationship of joy and trust, over the years, so they know that there's no way I would ever endorse another product or swear or do anything like that, because this character is one that I love and the relationship with Nintendo I hold so dear.

RetroBob: Do you play the games you are in, and do you enjoy playing anything else?

I love *Mario* games, I don't generally play other games unless I walk into a place and I see {Pac-Man} Wakka wakka wakka, and then I've gotta put a quarter in, right? I play well enough to know, that the princess is not in this castle [laughs] but I will never rescue the princess, I get to watch other people do it. If I can't cheat, I'm not going to win. [Laughter]

TheAlex: Do you ad-lib and improvise, and what ad-libs have made it into the games you voice?

Yes, hundreds of ad-libs have made it into the games. Because of the nature of the creativity in that room, it might come from the other side of the window, it might come from my side, we're just out there playing. But no doubt {Mario snores} Spaghetti, ravioli, mamma mia. That sort of thing, they put in.

Metal Gear Acid

IT'S GOT CARDS, YOU SAY?

» PSP » 2004 » Konami Computer Entertainment Japan

During last year's lockdown I finally decided to upgrade my PC after a 14-year wait and I bought the most expensive one I could afford. With an RTX 2070 Super installed it's capable of running most games at a high framerate, but all I really play on it is *Magic: The Gathering Arena*. I guess what I'm trying to tell you is that I really like playing card games.

Metal Gear Acid (or *Ac!d* if you want to be cute) is a good example of how I'll happily delve into a genre or series I'm not keen on if it means I can enjoy some card-based mechanics. I've only completed a handful of *Metal Gear* games but I utterly rinsed *Acid* and its superior sequel serval times. It's not because it's an amazing game, or because it has a fantastic story (it isn't and it doesn't) but I really enjoyed the card mechanics that powered everything from movement to combat.

You start *Acid*'s crazy story with a small deck of cards filled with numerous nods to the series, from beloved characters to weapons and items. Over the course of the game you'll add new cards to your deck with the aim to make it as streamlined and effective as possible. It's a neat mechanic that features in numerous board games and it offers a surprising amount of strategy, particularly as you only have access to six cards at a time.

All cards typically have a cost to them and the higher the cost the more effective it is during play. The downside of this is that there's a higher cooldown period, meaning you'll often give enemies an advantage if you constantly focus on playing flashier cards. It's a neat concept, but it's not always executed very well, partly because of some weird design quirks, but largely due to a lack of clear instruction on how certain cards work.

Even though it's not a perfect game, *Acid* does do a very good job of capturing the core essence of the series it was based on and it was that obvious love of the franchise by the developers that not only spurred me on to complete it, but also ensured I picked up the 2005 sequel. But that's a story for another issue. ✱

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RETRORATED

>> This month we revisit Monster World and Raiden IV, tackle the latest version of Virtua Fighter 5 and find out how the latest Guilty Gear release fares

PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

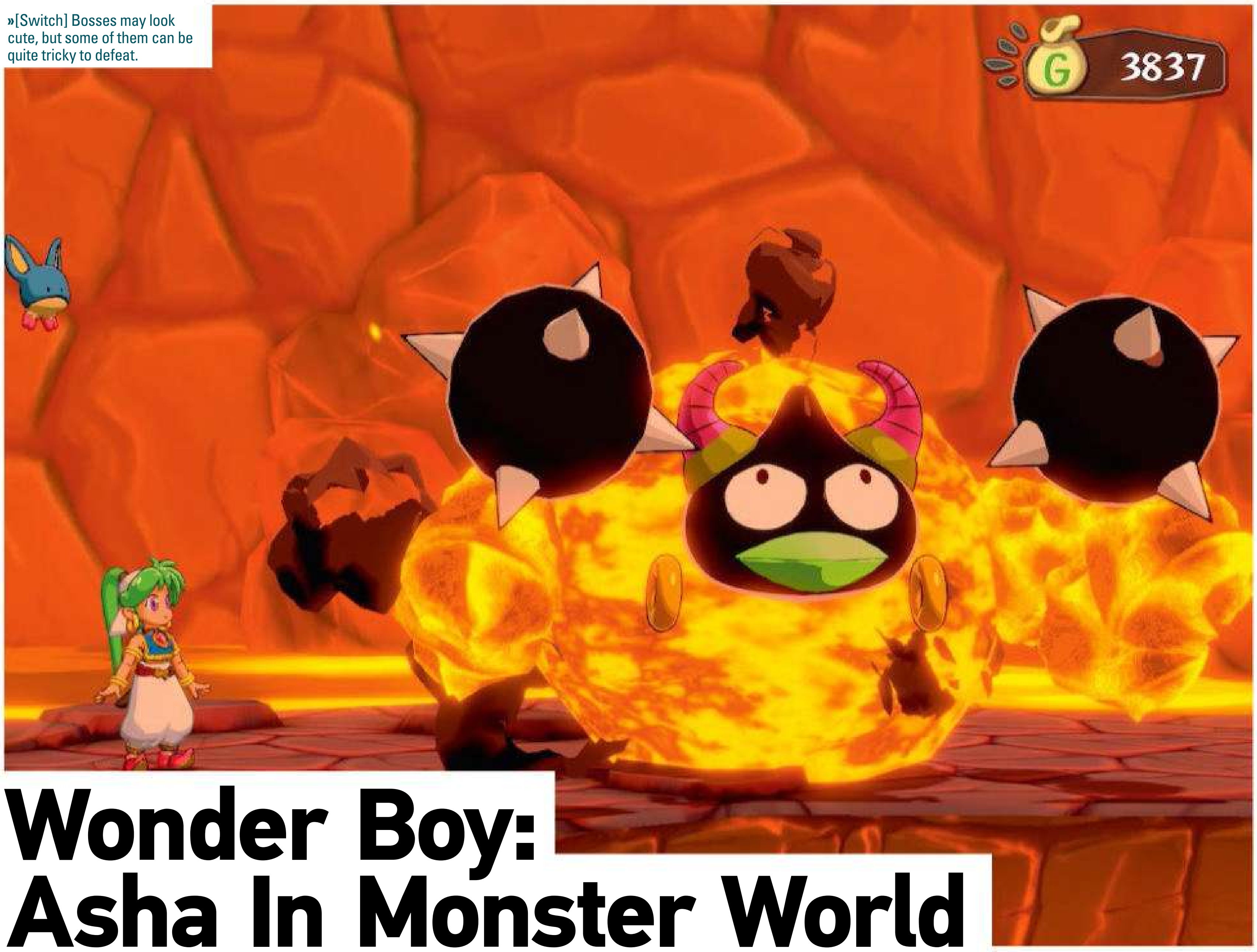
Raiden IV X Mikado Remix

It's already been released countless times, but this latest version of *Raiden IV* features some banging tunes and new modes. I love it.

NICK

Virtua Fighter 5 Ultimate Showdown

I celebrated the return of my favourite 3D fighting series with a 19 match winning streak in Ranked battles.



»[Switch] Bosses may look cute, but some of them can be quite tricky to defeat.

Wonder Boy: Asha In Monster World

DOES THE MEGA DRIVE CLASSIC GET A MEGA UPGRADE?

INFORMATION

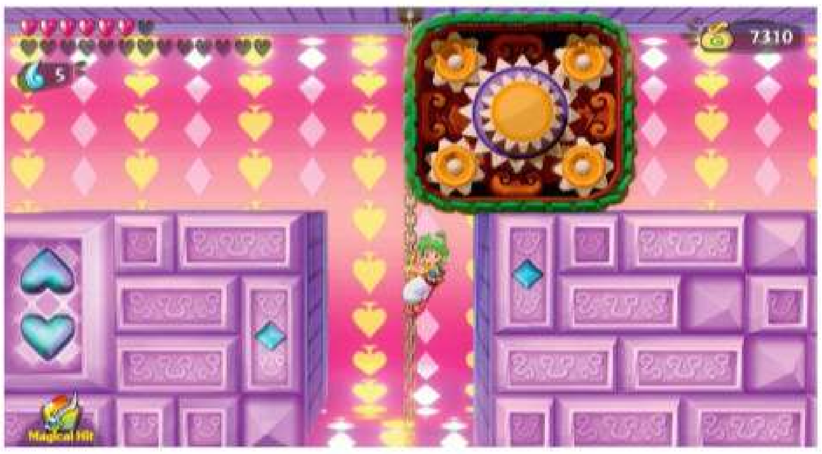
- » **FORMAT REVIEWED**
  SWITCH
- » **ALSO ON:**
  PS4
- » **RELEASED:**
  OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:**
  £31.49+ (DIGITAL), £34.99+ (PHYSICAL)
- » **PUBLISHER:**
  ININ GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:**
  STUDIOARTDINK
- » **PLAYERS:**
  1

The last few years have been good for *Wonder Boy* fans. We had a beautiful update of *The Dragon's Trap* in 2017, the rather brilliant *Monster Boy And The Cursed Kingdom* debuted in 2018 and now STUDIOARTDINK has decided to update *Monster World IV* for a new generation of gamers.

It's always a gamble tackling a beloved game and updating it for a new audience and while *Asha In Monster World* isn't quite perfect, it's hard to see how many could be upset with the team's diligence in ensuring that it stays highly faithful to the source material. We'd argue some part of *Asha*'s faithfulness is down to the involvement of Ryuichi Nishizawa, who has overseen all the new games in some form and created the original arcade classic back in 1986.

One thing you'll immediately notice when playing *Asha* is that it doesn't give you the ability to switch back to the original Mega Drive graphics. We loved switching between the different versions of *The Dragon's Trap*, but you soon realise that unlike Lizardcube's remaster, *Asha In Monster World* isn't a direct port. This becomes a lot more obvious once you get to the hub-like village of Rapadagna which has been expanded significantly over the Mega Drive original and feels a lot more impressive as a result. Numerous quality of life changes have been made as well, which certainly makes things a lot easier this time around.

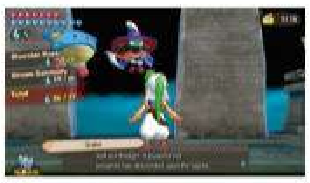
Asha can now run without the need of a double tap on the d-pad, a new Easy mode gives you more energy refills and lets you automatically hoover

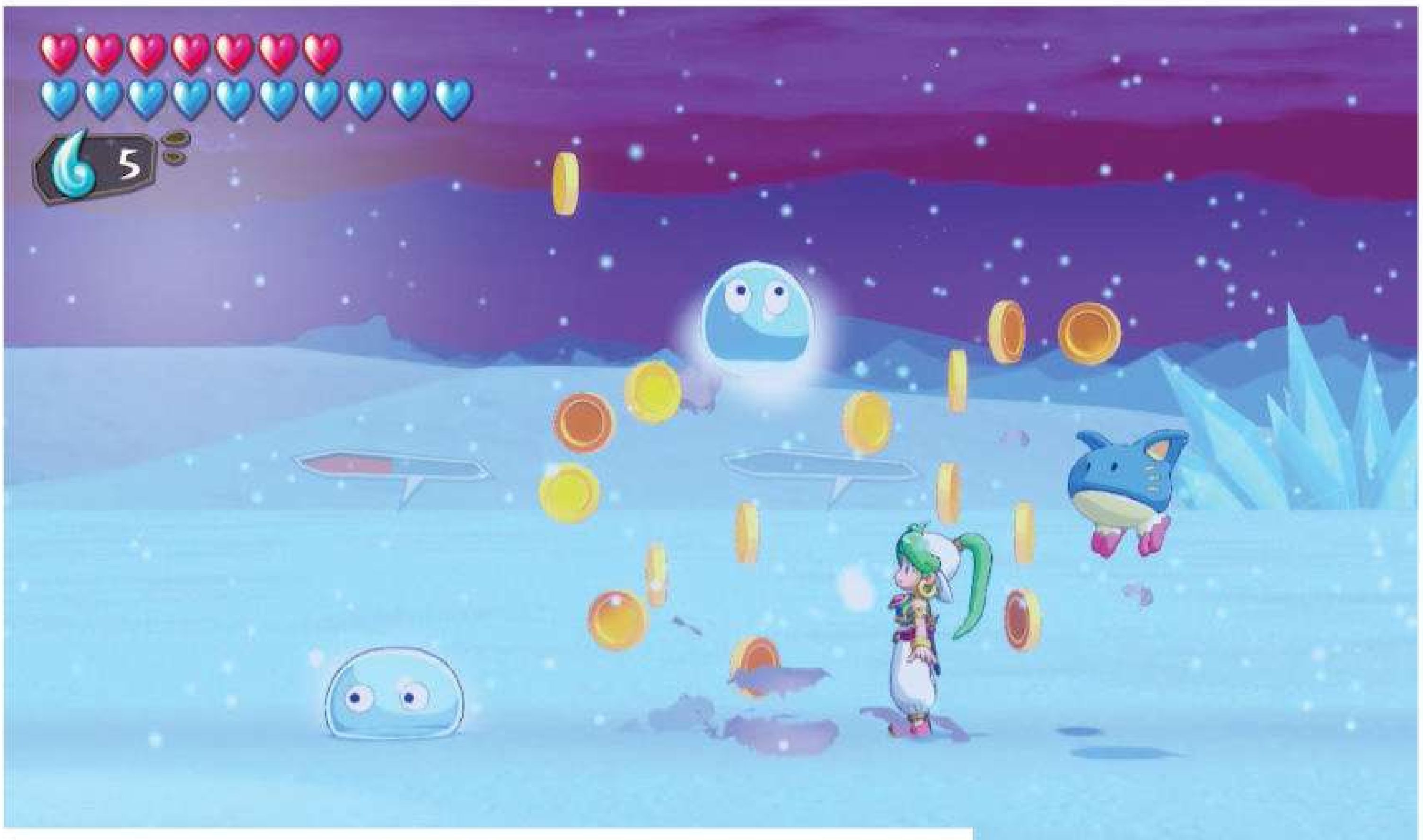


»[Switch] This later dungeon is not only tough on the reflexes, but also the eyes.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Few videogame franchises are as convoluted as the *Wonder Boy* series. The original game was created by Ryuichi Nishizawa and released in arcades for Sega in 1986. Several sequels followed, but as Westone retained copyright of the games it was able to licence out its games to Hudson Soft, which led to the *Adventure Island* series. Sega retains the *Wonder Boy* and *Monster World* trademarks and the most recent official game in the series, *Monster Boy In The Cursed Kingdom*, was released in 2018.

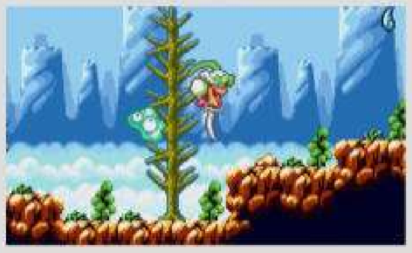




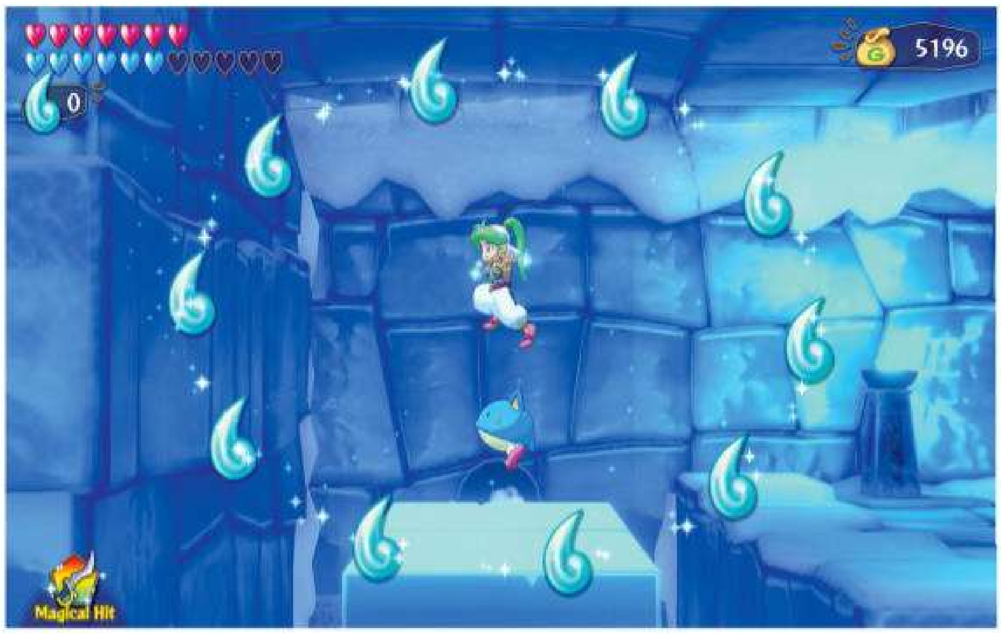
» [Switch] It wouldn't be a *Wonder Boy* game if enemies didn't explode into a shower of coins on death.

✱ DOUBLE THE VALUE

If you pick up the physical version of *Wonder Boy: Asha In Monster World* from ININ Games you'll receive the original Mega Drive game as well as the updated remaster. The coding team has done a decent job with the emulation and it's stuffed to the gills with all sorts of tweakable extras. You are able to fully customise the controls for starters and you can alter the display in various ways, from stretching everything out to fill the screen, to opting for a more natural presentation that preserves the original output. The options also extend to scaling and shaders and it's even possible to change the intensity of scanlines or add curvature to mimic the look of an older TV display. You might not be able to switch at will to the original game's graphics and music in the remaster, but this addition pretty much makes up for that omission and makes the physical release that little more desirable in the process.



» [Switch] Having access to *Monster World IV* is a nice little bonus. It's rather interesting to see how far the new game has come.



» [Switch] Collect ten Life Drops and you'll gain a new blue heart. Red hearts are obtained by buying specific items.

» [Switch] *Monster World* aims for a high framerate but doesn't always achieve it, so it can get a little choppy.

» [Switch] Pepelogoo's most useful ability is reviving you when you die, handy when there's no autosave!

up any nearby items and there are now more Life Drops to find. It's also possible to revisit previously completed dungeons in order to retrieve Life Drops (something which wasn't possible in the original adventure). By far the most significant change however is the ability to save at any time, rather than relying on the fixed checkpoints found in *Monster World IV*.

As good as this new freedom to save anywhere is, it comes with an extremely annoying caveat – there is no autosave function in the game, meaning if you forget to save for whatever reason you'll lose all your progress. It's a bafflingly bizarre design decision and we lost quite a lot of progress at various points due to forgetting. In the end we simply saved every few minutes which did interrupt the flow of play somewhat.

If you can get past this you'll still find plenty to enjoy in *Asha In Monster World*. The new visual overhaul looks gorgeous with some sumptuous locations and lovely use of lighting. Asha and her companion Pepelogoo are exceptionally animated and plenty of new cutscenes have been introduced to flesh out the original's rather simple story. Equally enjoyable is the new remixed music that takes the Arabian-themed flourishes found in the original game and gives them bouncy new compositions. There's no option to listen to the original music, but the new tunes are great and will have you tapping away as you hack and slash your way through enemies.

Aside from the aforementioned tweaks, the core gameplay is very much as it was in the original Mega Drive adventure, which means the RPG mechanics have been largely pared back and there's a far stronger focus on platforming. The four key dungeons you get to explore in search of missing spirits are challenging and you'll often search them with Pepelogoo in tow.

He's a fantastic addition to the series as you can use his abilities in numerous ways, from melting troublesome ice blocks, to protecting Asha from falling flames. None of the puzzles you encounter are particularly tricky to solve, but you'll often find yourself admiring each clever use of your blue friend. In fact it's rather telling that the pace and overall difficulty of the game changes when you don't have access to Pepelogoo, with the final dungeon proving a particular slog to get through.

Largely though, traversing *Monster World* is great fun and the design of the world is strong enough that you'll do plenty of exploring in order to find the 200 Life Drops that are scattered throughout the game. Asha is more than handy with her sword, able to attack upwards as well as downwards and a new charge attack has also been added, which can do devastating amounts of damage against bosses. While some of the character designs of the bosses don't always work the fights themselves are enjoyable and challenging. In fact, the only one we didn't enjoy involved fighting an oversized slime that a shrunken Asha must battle, though this skirmish was also a lowlight of the original game.

For the most part though, *Asha In Monster World* is an enjoyable adventure. Yes it's short, clocking in at around six hours, but there's replay value now you can revisit cleared dungeons and owners of the physical release also get access to the original Mega Drive adventure as well, which further adds value for money. In short, this is another enjoyable instalment in the *Wonder Boy* series. ✱

In a nutshell

It has a few technical issues and the save system is bizarre, but there's no denying that *Asha In Monster World* is a fun adventure that does justice to the Mega Drive original.

>> Score **70%**

RETRO ROUNDUP

WE LOOK AT THE LATEST RETRO-RELATED RELEASES

✱ PICK OF THE MONTH

Guilty Gear Strive

» System: PS4 (tested), PS5, PC **» Buy it from:** Retail, online **» Buy it for:** £44.99

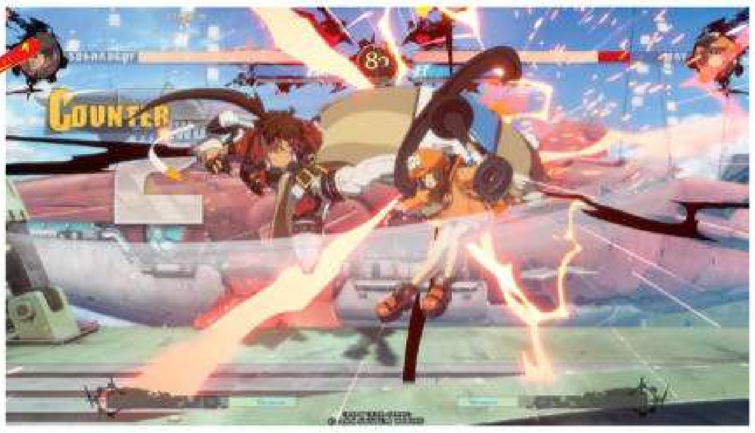
At first glance, *Guilty Gear Strive* is completely bewildering, a dazzling display of stunningly animated cel-shaded characters in a massive clash of projectiles and pyrotechnics. If you're new to it and you jump into a game cold, you'll probably get your head knocked off without really knowing how. Fortunately, Arc System Works has understood that *Guilty Gear* games have long been dauntingly complex, and has worked hard to implement a truly comprehensive tutorial that teaches you the basics. Even the move lists come with video demonstrations, accompanied by explanations of each attack's properties and purpose.

Guilty Gear Strive is a game that really requires you to pay attention to the tutorial, then – but the rewards are worth it. The game's 15 characters all look and feel unique, with hulking bruisers and nimble air-dashing fighters equally viable, and the game's signature mechanics allow you to perform crazy aerial combos, smash your opponent through the stage boundary and hit crushing counters. Most of the past mechanics have returned, though the divisive Instant Kill moves are not included.

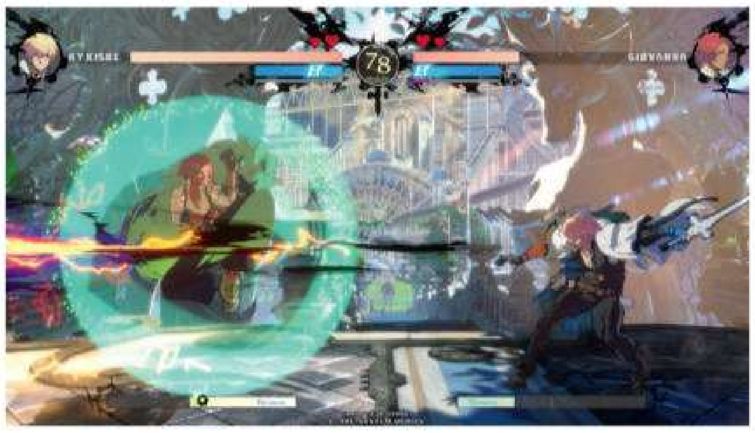
Single players get arcade and survival modes to play, along with a gallery full of items to unlock through playing the game. There's also a cinematic story mode that is a little bit mad, but is very well produced – though it doesn't allow you to do any fighting. The netcode for online multiplayer is excellent, and the lobby system is both fun and helpful in gauging your skill level.

Guilty Gear Strive looks phenomenal, with characters that look and feel like 2D sprites in action, and awesome backgrounds that are packed with detail. The heavy metal soundtrack might not be to everyone's tastes, but it's really good. It could do with a little more content, especially for solo players, but expansion is already on the way – the first season pass will add five characters, as well as two stage backgrounds and an extra story. You needn't wait though, as the game is already great.

>> Score **90%**



»[PS4] Sol hits a special on May, sending the screen into a frenzy of lightning and sparks.



»[PS4] Newcomer Giovanna uses a perfect guard to repel Ky's projectile attack.

Virtua Fighter 5 Ultimate Showdown

» System: PS4 **» Buy it from:** Online
» Buy it for: £24.99

AM2's classic fighting game is back, and despite being a refreshed version of a game that is now 15 years old, it's still one of the greatest 3D fighting games around. It's also simple to pick up, with no comeback mechanics or super gauges to keep track of – it's just you, three buttons and an opponent you need to pulverise. The upgrades over *Final Showdown* are mainly visual, with little to note in terms of gameplay tweaks. If you're into online or offline competition, this game will serve you well – the netcode is good despite not using rollback, though we'd have liked to be able to save match replays. Sadly, there's nothing beyond arcade mode to hold the interest of single players.

NICK THORPE

>> Score **80%**

Raiden IV X Mikado Remix

» System: Switch **» Buy it from:** Retail, online
» Buy it for: £29.99

This is an update of the PS4's *Raiden IV Overkill*, which itself was an update of *Raiden IV* on Xbox 360. Mechanically it's largely the same game meaning you get a port of the arcade game, new fighters, the excellent Overkill mode, a score attack offering and a new Additional mode that adds extra levels to the arcade game. It makes for a very comprehensive package and we'd argue that this Switch version improves things by making the TATE option far easier to enjoy, a Double mode that requires you to control two ships at the same time and an excellent new soundtrack from acclaimed musicians such as Daisuke Matsumoto and Soshi Hosoi. The end result is a stunning pack that will please any shmup fan.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **88%**

Ninja Gaiden: Master Collection

» System: Switch (tested) PC, PS4, Xbox One
» Buy it from: Online **» Buy it for:** £32.99+

We had high hopes for Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* trilogy on Switch. Sadly, it has been unable to live up to our expectations due to various performance issues. *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* remains excellent fun and while it shows its age at times, the combat is solid and the framerate hits a consistent 60 fps. Things fall apart with the sequels, which not only suffer from erratic framerates, but also have some visual issues as the dynamic resolution kills the otherwise stylish-looking graphics. These issues persist in both docked and handheld modes and as the games aren't available separately it becomes tricky to recommend. The games are still fun, but Switch isn't the best way to enjoy them.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score **60%**

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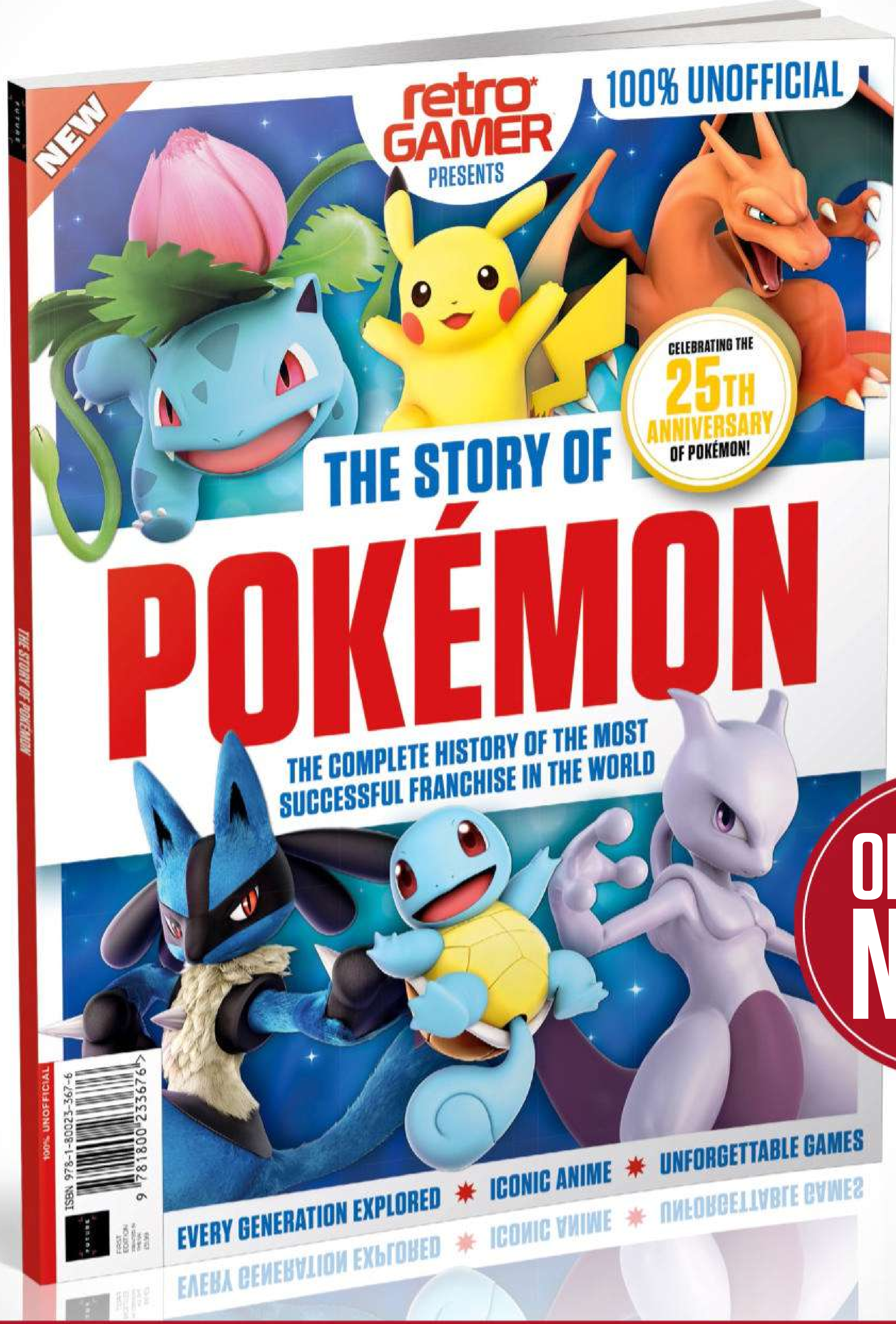
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ZELDA'S 35TH ANNIVERSARY

Our experiences with one of Nintendo's biggest series

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

Is *The Legend Of Zelda* the greatest gaming series of all time? It could be – *A Link To The Past, Ocarina Of Time* and *Breath Of The Wild* collectively represent a strong argument that it is. Since the series is celebrating a major anniversary soon, we're looking back at our time with it…

NICK Do you remember how you first encountered the *Zelda* series?

DARRAN I'm pretty sure my first memory of NES *Zelda* is in a magazine review. *CVG* maybe? I don't remember playing it when it first came out. At least I don't think I remember.

TIM *Captain N* I guess, but I didn't really take much notice. The first actual *Zelda* game I played to completion was *Ocarina Of Time*… in 2003. It was on a mate's Nintendo 64 and I played it while he was away somewhere.

NICK For me, it was the old *Zelda* cartoon series on TV-am – I also didn't touch any of the games until *Ocarina Of Time*.

DARRAN Hah. I've beat you all. The first *Zelda* game I actually played was *A Link To The Past* and it was great.

TIM It's not a competition, Darran!

DARRAN It's always a competition and I just won. On a more serious note, how did you find *Ocarina* after experiencing it a good five years after it came out?

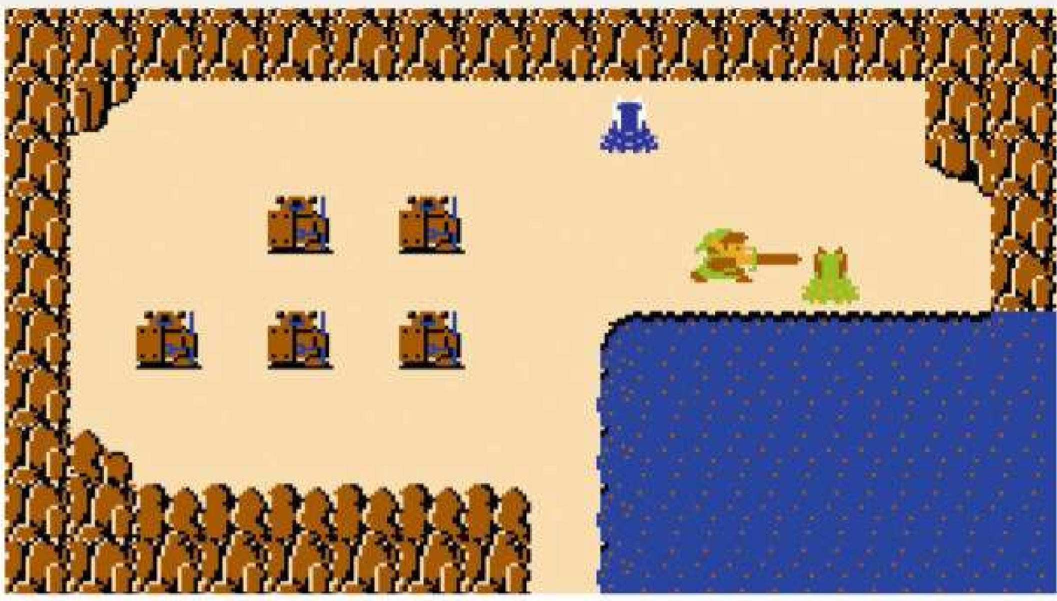
TIM It was great. It might have been one of the first Nintendo games I played really, and was very interesting in certain aspects of gameplay that you don't get from other developers.

DARRAN It's a real cliché, but walking out onto Hyrule Field for the first time and realising that you could actually visit everything you saw in the distance quite incredible. I remember reading the *Edge* review and the game didn't disappoint at all. In fact I completed it using a guide and Melanie would read out what I needed to do on the bits I got stuck on.

904
07
30
LIFE

Wah ha ha! What do you want, little man? Do you have something to ask me?

» [SNES] *A Link To The Past* was Darran's first encounter with the series, and one he greatly enjoyed.



» [NES] We all missed the original *Zelda*, but it still exemplifies the core concepts that make the series great.

TIM Yeah I'd a load of printouts from GameFAQS to help.

DARRAN That must have been a lot of paper!

TIM Inches thick!

NICK Being able to go anywhere is what I love about the series. From the first game right up to how ridiculously massive *Breath Of The Wild* is, there's always a sense of proper adventure. It makes the older games really easy to go back to.

DARRAN That's a very good point and something that Shigeru Miyamoto really managed to nail. Does anyone have a particular favourite moment from the series. In-game or otherwise?

NICK I love how you can steal from the shop in *Link's Awakening*, and that there are some actual consequences for doing that.

TIM Aside from the snotty kid in *The Wind Waker*, the reception that *Twilight Princess* got at E3 2004 was astounding. And then Miyamoto coming out with the sword and shield.

DARRAN Yes I remember that as well, although I always felt sorry for Eiji Aonuma as he was largely in charge of the series by that point and I felt he should have had the sword and shield.

DARRAN In terms of moments and keeping with the trade show theme. I thought the Space World 2000 fight between Link and Ganon looked exceptional and then *The Wind Waker* came out.

NICK I'll defend *The Wind Waker* all day long, that art style might not have been what people were expecting but it was gorgeous.

TIM It sure was an amazing-looking game. Especially the exceedingly stabby ending.

DARRAN Don't get me wrong, I like *The Wind Waker*, it just wasn't what I was expecting. I wasn't keen on the stealth sections, but the expressions on the characters were excellent. Ironically, when we did get a realistic-looking *Zelda*, it wasn't actually that good.

NICK 8.8? 8.8?!

DARRAN Is that a reference to the GameSpot controversy? Or is there a third score that's missing like in diving?

NICK Definitely the former. Turns out a lot of people can get very defensive over a game they haven't yet played!

DARRAN Have you played many of the modern games, Tim?

TIM Not yet, but if anyone says anything bad about *Breath Of The Wild* I will lose my shit!

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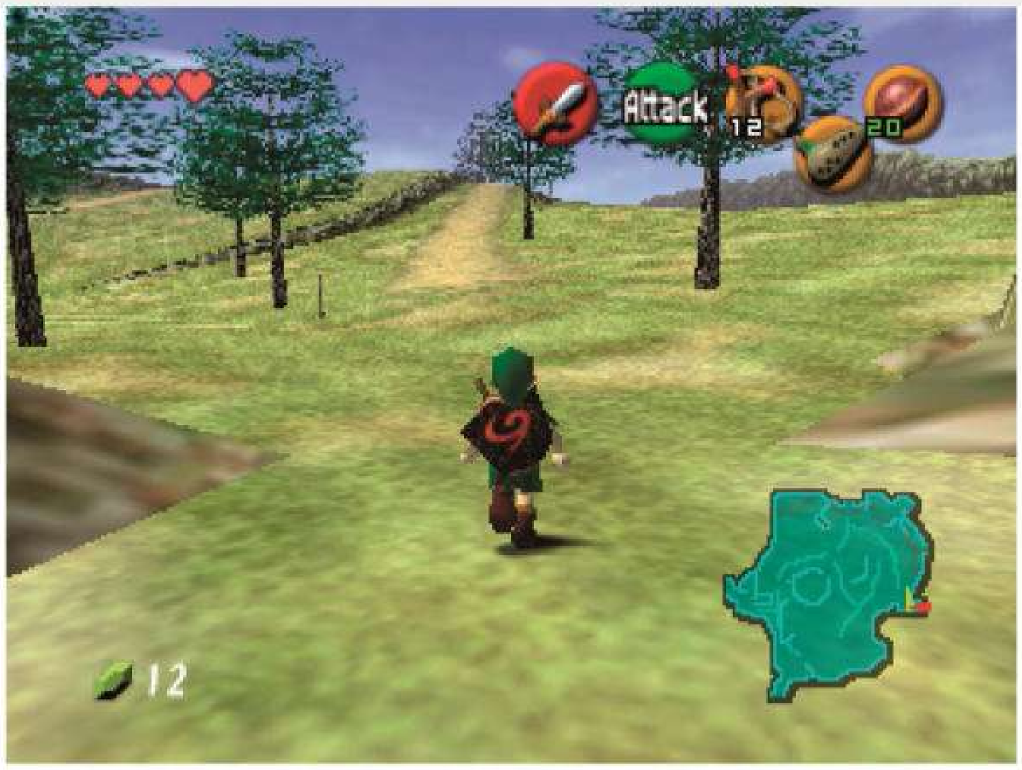
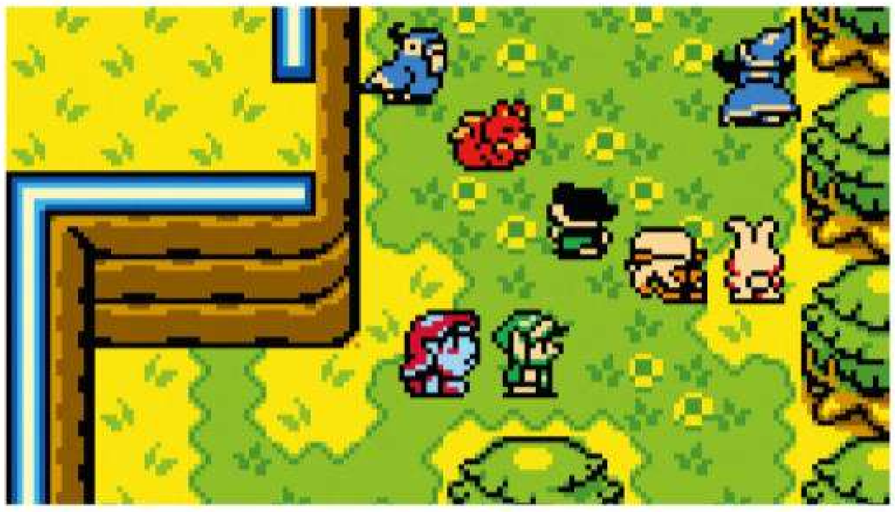
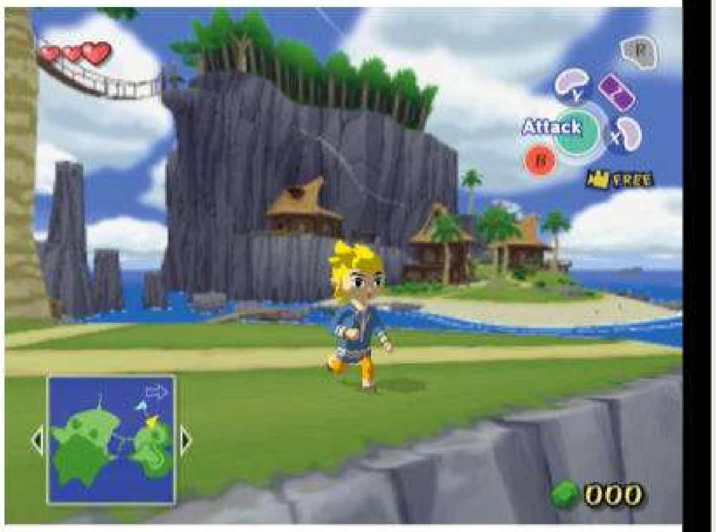


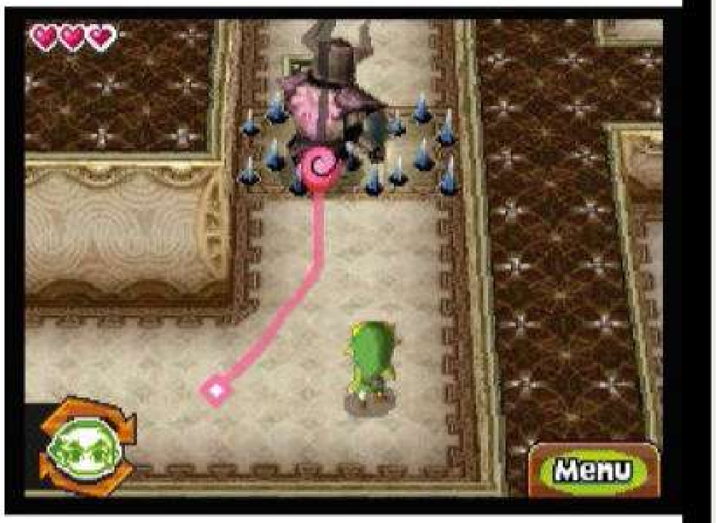
» [N64] You can just walk around. You want to go there? Go there. Simple, yet still revolutionary.



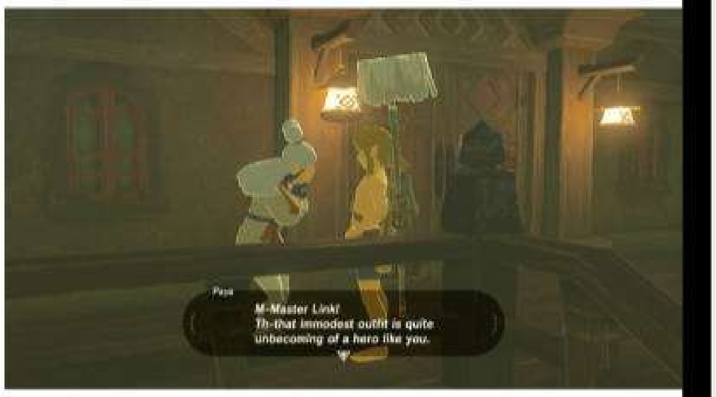
» [Game Boy Color] A remake of the *Oracle* games, like the *Link's Awakening* remake, would please us greatly.



» [GameCube] *The Wind Waker* has always looked great, contrary to the opinions of dull people who only value realism.

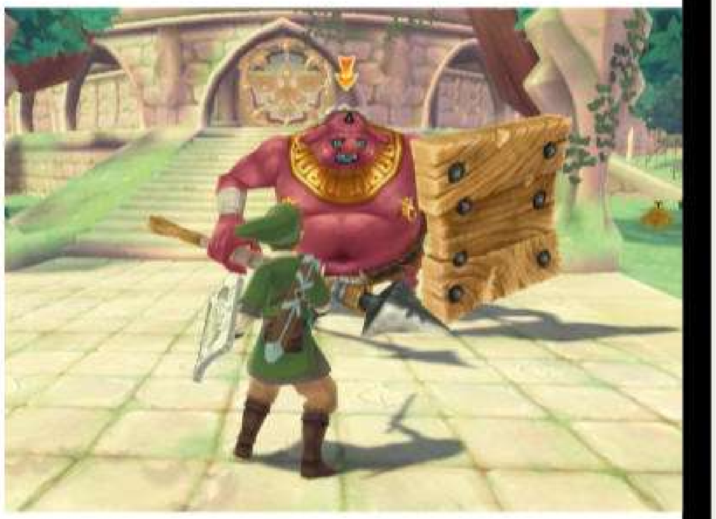


» [DS] *Spirit Tracks* and its predecessor *Phantom Hourglass* were slightly weak entries on Nintendo's best-selling system.



Paya
M-Master Link!
Th-that immodest outfit is quite unbecoming of a hero like you.

» [Switch] Although people concentrate on the sublime exploration and tricky puzzles, *Zelda* games can be pretty funny too.



» [Switch] *Skyward Sword HD* kicked off the anniversary celebrations, but an E3 reveal has now proven Darran's guess of a *Zelda* Game & Watch to be correct.

NICK It could do with more durable weapons, but I'd better not say any more about that.

DARRAN I think it's fantastic. I've completed it on both Wii U and Switch and it really is on another level. It might not have the visuals of its peers, but its world feels more alive if that makes sense?

TIM I'll have to get round to it at some point, the last one I played was *Phantom Hourglass*.

DARRAN I wasn't a huge fan of *Phantom Hourglass* to be honest. In fact in retrospect I think both *Phantom Hourglass* and *Spirit Tracks* are easily some of the weakest *Zelda* games.

NICK It's funny, because many of the handheld ones are so loved – *Oracle Of Ages/Seasons*, *A Link Between Worlds*, all those. I have a friend who argues that they're better than the 3D games.

DARRAN To be fair they feel like really grand adventures compared to the home console counterparts if that makes sense. *Link's Awakening* feels like an astonishing achievement.

NICK Thinking about the love Mario got for his 35th birthday, what are we hoping to see Nintendo do for the *Zelda* series?

DARRAN I want a *Zelda* Game & Watch and a HD update of *Ocarina Of Time* so we can stick it on the cover at some point.

TIM A compilation of all the ones I've not played, and bring them to the Xbox!

DARRAN But only if you can play them on Game Pass. Lol!

READERS REACT

What are your favourite Zelda moments?

The Gamer Dad
Ocarina Of Time is very special to me. I resonated with Link when I was a kid because I always felt no one wanted me around, I was depressed and had lots of emotions I can't describe, but kid Link was incredible and was doing amazing things so I felt a part of his journey when I played.

Daniel Betts
For me it has to be the moment you take control of the King Of Red Lions for the first time. I don't think any game has ever captured the joy of sailing like Nintendo did with *The Wind Waker*. Just one of many stand out moments in the game.

Rev. Phil Richardson
Entering Hyrule Field for the first time in *Ocarina Of Time*. Such freedom to run around and investigate!

Gareth McCluggage
That opening sequence in *A Link To The Past*. Running through the rain to get past the guards and into the castle. The atmosphere and music are legendary to this day.

Commodore 128
Majora's Mask is an emotionally powerful game, but the moment that sticks out to me the most is when you find Pamela and her father at Ikana Canyon. Freeing him from his curse and seeing the reunion after, all with the *Song Of Healing* in the background, is heart-wrenching.

Rob Orchard
The first time you climb a tower in *Breath Of The Wild* and it dawns on you how much of Hyrule you get to explore!

Oblisky
The agony of knowing waking the wind fish will make the island disappear along with Marin. Triumph has never been so sad.

Cliff Reese
"It's dangerous to go alone! Take this".

Maybe Chris
As Wolf Link, desperately racing a gravely injured Midna to Hyrule Castle, while that beautiful piano plays in the background. Always sticks in my mind.

Pete Povey
The bit when you get a treasure and hold it up in glory.

OneOneTwo
Zelda II's final dungeon was a gruelling gauntlet that was a real challenge to overcome, but immensely satisfying to complete.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP

"What I loved about the game was the fact you had to turn into different animals and go back to all previous areas to use the special skills you now have to reach items you couldn't before, I had not seen that in a game before."

PAID: "ONE OF THE VERY FEW GAMES I KEPT FROM MY CHILDHOOD"

STAR WARS: DARK FORCES

"One of my favourite games even to this day. I picked my original copy up at a car boot about a year after it had been released and it's one of the only original big box PC games that I still have from that time."

PAID: £12

BIO

NAME:
Craig Burgess

LOCATION:
Chelmsford, UK

FAVOURITE GAME:
Theme Park (PC)

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Master System

COLLECTION WORTH:
"No idea, wouldn't like to guess"

TWITTER:
@BudgieRetro

BIG BOX FRESH

From a Master System to a masterful PC collection

This month's collector has a tale of love and loss that should be familiar to many of us. "I got my first console back in the late-Eighties, it was a Master System which I managed to convince my parents to buy from a family member," says Craig Burgess, an IT project manager from Essex. "It came with several games including *Wonder Boy III*, *Golvellius*, *Choplifter* and *Rastan* which were so impressive to me having only seen games on my brother's Commodore 64 which seemed to take forever to load. I had a friend who had a NES at the time and always thought the Master System was the more impressive system, I still believe that to this day."

While consoles are clearly a big passion for Craig, he was eventually drawn into PC gaming when he got an IBM 486 DX2/66 at the age of 12. "The main reason for getting a PC was that I knew I wanted to work in IT and having my own PC would enable me to learn the components and operating systems," he explains. However, like plenty of us, he had to sell up and move on. "One of the reasons for getting rid of most of my original collection was space," says Craig. "When I moved out in my late-20s I didn't have room to take most of it with me, so ended up selling most of it.

What's quite impressive is how quickly the new collection was put together, as Craig has only been actively collecting again for three years now. "Lucky for me my brother, who is 14 years older than me, had kept his Mega Drive and Mega-CD which he got on release day and that got me started again." So what's the motivation for resuming the hobby? "I love the fact that I can now own systems which I couldn't obtain or afford when I was younger, being able to experience them now is certainly one of the main reasons for having them," he explains.

Beyond his many consoles and an impressive PC setup with three monitors, that comes in handy in his career as well as for gaming, big box PC games are a passion of Craig's. "The benefit of getting a PC was the ridiculous amount of games available and the art style used on the boxes was amazing." Though he has had to pick up most of the software from scratch, he was more fortunate with hardware. "I did manage to keep one of my original Windows 98 PCs from my early work days as an IT support engineer, which is now used to play DOS and Windows games from my collection."

Craig goes through phases of picking up different systems, and having found little luck with car boot sales and charity shops, he favours eBay for specific items and Facebook groups for good deals. "When I started collecting again there was a retro gaming shop open called the Retro Hunter about 20 minutes from me, I have purchased a lot of my collection from there as well," he elaborates. "I was restricted in terms of space in my previous games room but earlier this year I had this room built which will allow for the collection to grow, not that my wife knows that!"

But with such a young collection, Craig naturally has plenty of things still to track down. "I started to collect the Japanese consoles recently, so many systems that we never got to see here in the UK," he says. "I would love to get my hands on a Sharp X68000 or Fujitsu FM Towns. I love the look of these computers and it comes from my love of PCs in general I think. I also love football manager games so I try and collect as many of these as I can, I want to get my hands on all of the different versions of the *Championship Manager* series." Best of luck, Craig! ✱

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

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MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

"LucasArts had so many good point-and-click adventures in the Nineties. *Monkey Island 2* was probably the first one I owned and I still enjoy going through it now."

PAID: £30

SEGA NOMAD

"I loved my Game Gear back in the day and never knew there was a Mega Drive handheld until I started collecting again. I got my hands on one which had been refurbished with a new screen and USB power."

PAID: £230

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

NEO GEO AES

■ "I always wanted one after seeing it in a *GamesMaster* magazine in the early Nineties. I managed to pick this up from the owner of a retro game shop who was selling his own console, and it came with the MVS convertor and 161 in 1 cartridge. Collecting games for the AES is an expensive business."

PAID: £450

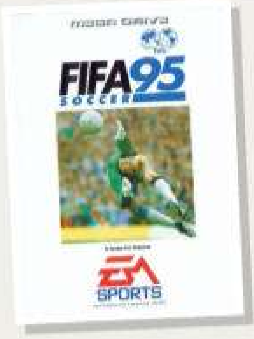
BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

THE KING OF FIGHTERS '98

Fancy a go on one of SNK's best fighters? If you want the authenticity of a Neo Geo AES cartridge, a complete Japanese copy starts at a surprisingly affordable **£140.** A Neo Geo CD copy can run you as little as **£13,** though it often goes for more, and the PlayStation version is similarly priced. If you want the enhanced *Ultimate Match* version for PS2, which also includes the original version, a PAL copy will cost you about **£95.**

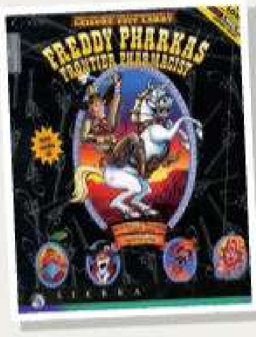


FIFA SOCCER 95

EA's stellar footballing sequel is one of the very cheapest Mega Drive games you can buy, with complete copies coming in as low as **50p** before postage is factored in. Even the North American version, which should be rarer given the lower popularity of the sport in that region, can go for **£2** – and it's a region-free game anyway.

SUMMER GAMES

Those of you wanting a summer of sport can find Epyx's game on C64 for around **£30** on disk and **£8** on tape. It looks like the Spectrum version was confined to compilations, although a Kixx edition exits and rarely costs more than **£2.** If you want a console version, the Atari 2600 game goes for **£5-£20** in NTSC form.



FREDDY PHARKAS: FRONTIER PHARMACIST

This often overlooked adventure classic goes for around **£18** on CD-ROM, with a 3.5-inch floppy disk version being a bit more expensive with prices starting from **£26.** However, if you're looking to run the game on modern operating systems and don't mind about owning a digital copy over a physical one, the game is on GOG for **£4.79.**

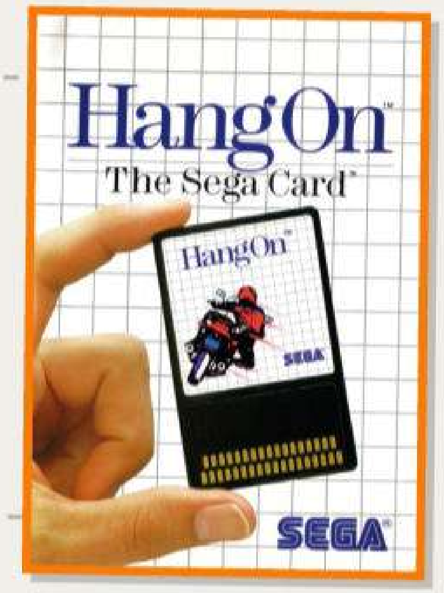
MONSTER WORLD IV

The original Mega Drive version of this game was only released in Japan, and prices vary wildly. We've seen a complete copy go for **£80,** albeit with a scuffed up manual and a slightly faded spine – for tip-top condition, expect something more like **£100-£150.** The new version, or a Mega Drive Mini, might be a more affordable bet.

HOW MUCH?!

HANG-ON

A complete copy of the Sega Card version of this game is quite an expensive thing to buy. There are plenty of card-only copies, starting for as little as **£15.** A complete copy of the later cartridge release will cost you about the same. The last boxed, complete copy of the card version, though – that sold for a whopping **£500.** If you just want to play the game, there's a fairly clear choice to be made in how to buy it.



Prices correct at time of print

SATURN MEMORIES

Darran on why he'll never sell Sega's console

My first hands-on introduction with the Saturn was a visit to Brady Kent's house. In addition to having a cool name, he had also picked up Sega's console a few months after launch along with *Virtua Fighter*, *Daytona USA*, *Bug!* and *Panzer Dragoon*. He'd spent close to £600 on his purchase and my first thought was the sheer cost of entry into this exciting new 32-bit world.

Brady had already bigged up the machine during an earlier *Dungeons & Dragons* session and while he was prone to the odd bit of hyperbole, he'd rarely steered me wrong with past purchases so I was eager to see if Sega's new console lived up to the hype. While both *Daytona USA* and *Virtua Fighter* weren't quite up to the standards of their arcade parents, there was no denying that they were still a lot of fun to play. Equally enjoyable was *Bug!* a new platformer by Realtime Associates, although if I'm honest, the game hasn't aged well these days. Still I was floored at the time thanks to its slick perspective shifts and it felt a world away from the plaformers I was playing on my Mega Drive.

And then of course there was *Panzer Dragoon*, an on-rails shooter that looked and sounded like no other game I had ever played. I was transfixed by its abstract style and glorious soundtrack and it was the title that convinced me that I needed a Saturn of my own. Needless to say, within a few short months I had saved up some money, sold off my Mega Drive and picked up my own machine in early 1996 along with *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Sega Rally* and *Virtua Cop*, which I often played whenever I visited Brady's house.

My relationship with Sega's console didn't last however, as I was disappointed with the release schedule and that more exciting games, including *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, were available on the PlayStation or confined to Japan. Not being able to afford to buy games for multiple consoles I switched ship, moving across to Sony's console and later the N64. I still played on the Saturn as Brady never switched and he had built up a decent library of games, but I convinced myself that I no longer needed one, so I didn't feel like I was missing out on anything.

When my eldest daughter Emily was born in 2000 I sold off all of the videogames I owned because I genuinely felt I wouldn't have time for them anymore. Around eight months after Emily's birth I developed depression and each day became a constant battle for both myself and my wife, Melanie. We struggled with mortgage payments, and I struggled with work, often bursting into tears at the sheer thought of trying to get through the day. I went part-time for several months, which added to the financial pressure and in many ways made things worse.

I eventually went back to work full-time, but I continued to battle my depression and did so for many years afterwards. Melanie would suggest all sorts of things to cheer me up and it was around this time that I started writing about videogames for a website called GameStyle. Writing about games took off some of the edge and my depression would instead be a gnawing ache in me rather than the overwhelming demon it had been previously. I suffered another relapse around 2004, which led to me visiting forums like shmups.com, which is still around today. I guess I was looking for things that made me happy and reminiscing about arcade shooters I used to play did just that.

It was at this time that I discovered the import side of Sega's Saturn and the many amazing games, particularly shmups, that had never received a release in the UK. An opportunity came up to buy a This Is Cool Saturn with 28 shooters for £500 and I leapt at the chance. We didn't have the money of course, but Mel let me have it anyway, possibly because she thought it would trigger another relapse in me. Obviously buying an import Saturn didn't cure my depression but it proved to be a distraction at the time and it's something that I'd never consider selling as a result because it helped me get through some tough times.

What I've always found interesting about the Saturn is that it's a very different console depending on where you live. Well over 1,000 games were released on Sega's console in Japan, but there were only around 240 PAL releases, meaning many Western gamers only got a glimpse of the Saturn's true potential. I fell in love with the Saturn due to its sheer number of exceptional shooters, but my collection has now extended to include several PAL releases, while a recent purchase of a Satiator has allowed me to experience fan translations of titles like *Grandia*, one of several acclaimed RPGs that we never received in the UK.

I've been growing my collection again over the past month and while certain games are now prohibitively expensive – my collection which cost me £500 in 2004 is now valued at around £3.5k today – there are still plenty of great titles that you can grab for very little cash. If you do decide to take the plunge and fancy testing the import waters, you'll discover that there's a lot more to Sega's console than first meets the eye. ✱

ON THE HIT LIST

TITLES I'D LIKE TO ADD TO MY COLLECTION AT SOME POINT

GUARDIAN FORCE

This is one of the shooters I regretted selling to fund my camera lens. It now sells for over £150, so I'll probably get the incoming Switch reissue.

STREET FIGHTER ZERO 3

Another game I once owned which now commands silly prices. The US PlayStation version is in English, but doesn't run as well.

QUAKE

I remember playing this at a friend's house and it's something I've always wanted to own.

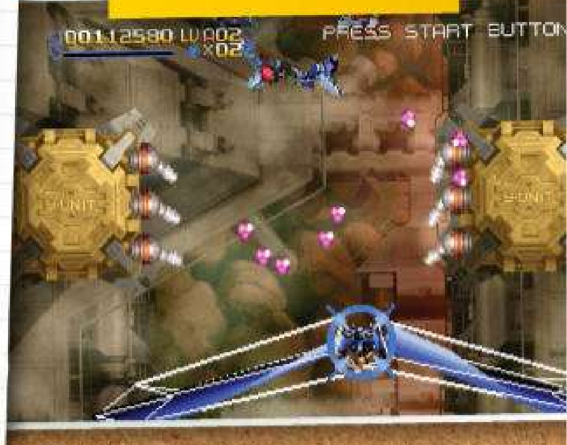
DEEP FEAR

I like survival horror games but the most terrifying thing about it now is the price – it sells for over £300!

LAST BRONX

I've been enjoying a lot of fighting games lately and this 3D one is supposed to be pretty decent.

[SATURN] DESPITE ITS HIGH ACCLAIM, RADIANT SILVERGUN HASN'T JUMPED AS HIGH IN PRICE AS OTHER SATURN SHMUPS HAVE.



I DON'T HAVE MANY PAL GAMES, BUT MOST OF THE ONES I DO HAVE ARE PLAYABLE AT 60HZ, WHICH PLEASES ME GREATLY.

SEGA SATURN
KINGS
BAKU BAKU
MASS DESTRUCTION

GALE RACER
POWER DRIFT

SATURN FANS UNITE

Plenty of readers still enjoy Sega's console

Matthew Edwards
The Saturn has so many amazing fighting games. *Street Fighter Zero 3*, *Samurai Shodown IV* and *X-Men Vs Street Fighter*. That Ryu and Cyclops handshake gets me every time! I love collecting the RAM cart boxsets, they're so unique. I've got a factory sealed *Panzer Dragoon Saga* as well.

Mark Jones
I love the Saturn, it's my favourite console. I've recently been delving into the Japanese games, and there's some really great stuff. *The X-Men Vs Street Fighter* port is incredible.

Dave
I used to have a collection of over 300 Saturn games but didn't play a lot of them, so I sold a load and kept my favourites. There's some great arcade racers on there like *Daytona USA*, *Sega Rally* and *Manx TT*.

Chris Legg
I have spent hundreds collecting for the Saturn, but my favourite game remains *Saturn Bomberman*, which I was given for my 15th birthday!

Simon Pike
My Saturn games are the pride of my game collection. My favourites are *Dragon Force*, *Shining Force III* and *Shining The Holy Ark*. The gameplay and ideas of all three still hold up to this day.

Patrick Maguire
The only Japanese console I own, and was only bought so I could have arcade ports of *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* and *Marvel Vs Street Fighter*. Fantastic Conversions!

Robert August de Meijer
I will take to my grave that Saturn had a better selection of games than the Playstation until *Final Fantasy VII* (late 1997) was released.

I'VE SOLD OFF ABOUT FIVE SHOOTERS I DIDN'T ENJOY TO FUND A CAMERA LENS, BUT I WON'T BE PARTING WITH THESE BEAUTIES.

JACKY
08
ROUND 4
2'45"24

[SATURN] GAMES LIKE VIRTUA FIGHTER 2 ARE STILL EXCELLENT AND WON'T COST A SMALL FORTUNE.

[SATURN] I COMPLETED NIGHTS INTO DREAMS EARLIER THIS YEAR. IT IS STILL ONE OF THE CONSOLE'S HIGHLIGHTS.

SEGA SATURN
TEMPEST
SEGA SATURN

SADLY, MANY PAL GAMES COME IN TERRIBLE CARDBOARD CASES LIKE TEMPEST 2000. THE LATER PLASTIC CASES ARE MUCH BETTER.

ELEVATOR ACTION RETURNS
LODE RUNNER

SEGA'S CONSOLE HAS SOME FANTASTIC JAPANESE RELEASES, FROM FIGHTING GAMES TO ARCADE CONVERSIONS.

This is COOL
SEGA

MY THIS IS COOL SATURN GOT ME THROUGH SOME TOUGH TIMES AND I'LL NEVER SELL IT.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books

OLD!
THE NES BOOK

» [Mega Drive] We can't promise a book, but we can promise a screenshot of *Sonic 2*, Nick's favourite *Sonic* game.

GOTTA GO BIG

Hi **Retro Gamer,**

I really enjoyed the recent issue celebrating 30 years of *Sonic* games. Is there any chance at all you would be able release a *The Story Of Sonic* book in a similar style to the one you have recently done on the *Pokémon* games? It would be a great excuse to be able to write about the more modern *Sonic* games which might not have a traditional home inside the regular magazine.

Best wishes,

Lucas Busetto

Thanks for writing in Lucas, we're glad you enjoyed the issue. Our old production editor Drew is now working on various retro books, so we'll have a word with him and see if we can sort anything out.

STILL SEARCHING

Hi there,

Is there a way to look up in which **Retro Gamer** issues a certain game appeared? Do you have a searchable csv file or a database or something? Could that perhaps be made public? The mindset is, I take my time playing a game, and I like to really dive in, and your articles in **Retro Gamer** really add to the experience. There have been so many issues I no longer can tell if, or in which issue, a game was featured or not. It would be really handy to just open a spreadsheet and do a search. Perhaps it's something you could consider for issue 250.

With kind regards and thanks for your work,

Sjors Jansen

» Sjors will never need to worry about finding a specific game in **Retro Gamer** again.

Thanks for getting in touch with us, Sjors. We don't have anything official on the magazine that can be shared, but you will find a useful database at bit.ly/parkprodret which has all the information you're after.

WHERE'S RAYMAN?

Dear **Retro Gamer,**

It took me 26 years of being a *Rayman* fan to learn that *Rayman 2: The Great Escape* on the PlayStation had a hidden 2D *Rayman* prototype that was playable once you collected 90% of the Lums in the game! I would love to see you guys feature that in **Retro Gamer**! It reminds me of the *Rayman* SNES prototype you featured in issue 176. You can see it at https://youtu.be/9ugVO5Di-3k.

Kind regards,

Matteo Fossi

PRESS TO JUMP. PRESS TO SHOOT.

» [PlayStation] Do you know of any hidden secrets in games? Actually, that sounds like a good feature idea.

Thanks for telling us about this, Matteo. It's always nice to find little secrets hidden in games you enjoy playing. That's quite an impressive reward to be fair and it sounds well hidden.

OLDER SCROLLS

Dear **Retro Gamer,**

I've just had a fantastic realisation. The *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is now old enough to appear in your hallowed magazine. I know it originally made its debut on Xbox 360 and PC, but Bethesda's game is now a staggering 15 years old, so it's not new by any consideration of the word. I'd love to have an in-depth look at this fantastic game. Hell, you should probably get it on the cover, it's that important a

STAR LETTER

NOSTALGIA 2.0

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

First up – well done Darran for steering the ship so well and congrats on over 200 issues!

Nostalgia 2.0 (as I'm calling it) should help soothe the debate about what is 'retro' and it's probably best explained as a story. I was lucky enough to get hold of a massive, heavy CRT TV recently, and over the last few months, I have crafted a trolley so I can hide it out of the way when I need to. When the aforementioned TV gets rolled out, it's a joy to behold. With a PS1 hooked in, a GameCube and Sega Saturn, it's gaming perfection.

Now to my point. I've a five in front of my age and nostalgia used to mean clinging to Speccy, VCS, C64 and Amstrad stuff. But boy, the feeling of Nostalgia 2.0 as that PS1 boot up sequence happens, is just as poignant as the *Manic Miner* tune.

Top work all.

Regards,

Matt

You're absolutely right Matt, nostalgia comes in all shapes and sizes and while many of us will link it to our youth, later events can trigger those same feelings. Darran had a mortgage when the Saturn came out but he probably loves it just as much as the Amstrad, which he had as a child. Thanks for your interesting viewpoint and we'll send you a book for your troubles.

1P
8800
CREDIT 9
PRESS START
SPEED UP

» [PlayStation] It's nice to see readers like Matt getting nostalgic for 32-bit systems like the PlayStation.

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CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer,
Future Publishing, Quay House,
The Ambury, Bath,
Somerset, BA1 1UA
Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [PC] Darran still plays *Magic: The Gathering Arena* whenever he gets a chance. He sold off his physical collection years ago.

game. I can still remember escaping that sewer and discovering the huge expanse of Cyrodiil like it was yesterday. Make it so, as Patrick Stewart (who voiced Emperor Uriel Septim VII in the game) used to say on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

David Waters

Doesn't time fly, David? We have covered *Oblivion* as part of a bigger *Elder Scrolls* series back in issue 131, so we're probably due another look at it shortly. We'll see who we can get in contact with.

THAT'S MAGIC!

Hi **Retro Gamer,**

Have you featured the excellent *Magic: The Gathering* game that Microprose released in 1997? It was mentioned in your recent *Civilization II* feature and I had no idea that Sid Meier was involved. In fact, while I think about it, how about a history piece on *Magic: The Gathering*? Numerous versions of the game have been released, from the excellent to the terrible and it would be great to read more about them.

Mark Reynolds

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

E3 news

We'll hopefully look at E3 in more depth next month, but in the meantime here are some early thoughts. Nick loves that *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood* is getting an official English release on its original hardware. Darran loves the look of *Metal Slug Tactics* and *Metroid Dread*, but was disappointed by Capcom's presentation, while Tim is looking forward to *Elden Ring*. Andy completely forgot it was on!

Funnily enough Mark, we ran an article about *Magic: The Gathering* back in issue 144. Darran has been playing the game since 1995 and Nick is a big fan too so we can probably put something together in a future issue. We'll speak to our contacts at Hasbro and see what can be worked out. If anything it's an excuse for Darran to play *Arena*.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite character or game from The King Of Fighters series?

Ryan Horton
Joe in *KOF '95*. He was the only fighter I could win with as a child…

Dangerous Sam Smith
My boy Sie Kensou, lover of meat buns and Athena.

The Blu Kombatant
That's a hard one. If I had to choose only one, Whip would be it. The mix-up of long range and high mobility makes her difficult to go against.

Stevie Aaron
Kyo, cos it felt that SNK fighters finally had their own original character that was cool as hell. Though saying that, Terry was always pretty great I suppose.

MrMidLife
Fave character is King. Fave Game is *XIV*. I knew and owned some previous *KOF* games, but *XIV* was the one that helped me properly learn.

Tim Brown
King, she has great offence and defence in a match. I felt her full potential was achieved in *KOF '98*.

Steven Hall
For me it was Geese Howard. I just thought he looked cool and had a cool name!

Craig Taylor
Can't get enough of the Tae Kwon Do stylings of Kim Kaphwan. I love punching people with my feet!

Max t Witter
Gamewise it has to be *KOF '96* for me. Even if I liked the roster in *'97* and *'99* a tad more, the whole atmosphere, the music, background and of course Goenitz make this my favourite one.

Adam Jones
Does Rock Howard count? Because he was pretty boss.

Alex
Goenitz was the best boss the series ever had.

Snoogans
It's King. I strongly believe that King inspired the creation of Sanji in *One Piece*: waitress, enthusiast of fine cuisine, similar blonde hairdo and specialised in kick attacks.

retro GAMER

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury,
Bath, Somerset, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Darran 'Iori Yagami' Jones**
darran.jones@futurenet.com
0330 3906443
Art Editor **Andy 'Andy Bogard' Salter**
Production Editor **Tim 'Ryo Sakazaki' Empey**
Features Editor **Nick 'King' Thorpe**
Photographer **Phil 'Goro Daimon' Barker**
Group Art Director **Woz 'Fatal Fury team' Brown**
Editorial Director **Tony 'Chang Koehan' Mott**

Contributors
Writing Adam Barnes, Martyn Carroll, Ashley Day, Paul Drury, James Dyson, Andrew Fisher, Iain Lee, Graeme Mason, Rory Milne, Paul Rose, Paul Walker-Emig, Alan Wen, Gem Wheeler
Design Emma Wood

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Advertising Director **Tom Parkinson**
tom.parkinson@futurenet.com
Account Director **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com

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Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
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Subscriptions
Email enquiries **help@magazinesdirect.com**
Customer service phone line **0330 333 433**
New orders phone line **0330 333 1113**
Online orders **magazinesdirect.com**
Senior Marketing Manager **Tom Cooper**

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
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Commercial Finance Director **Dan Jotcham**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

ISSN 1742-3155

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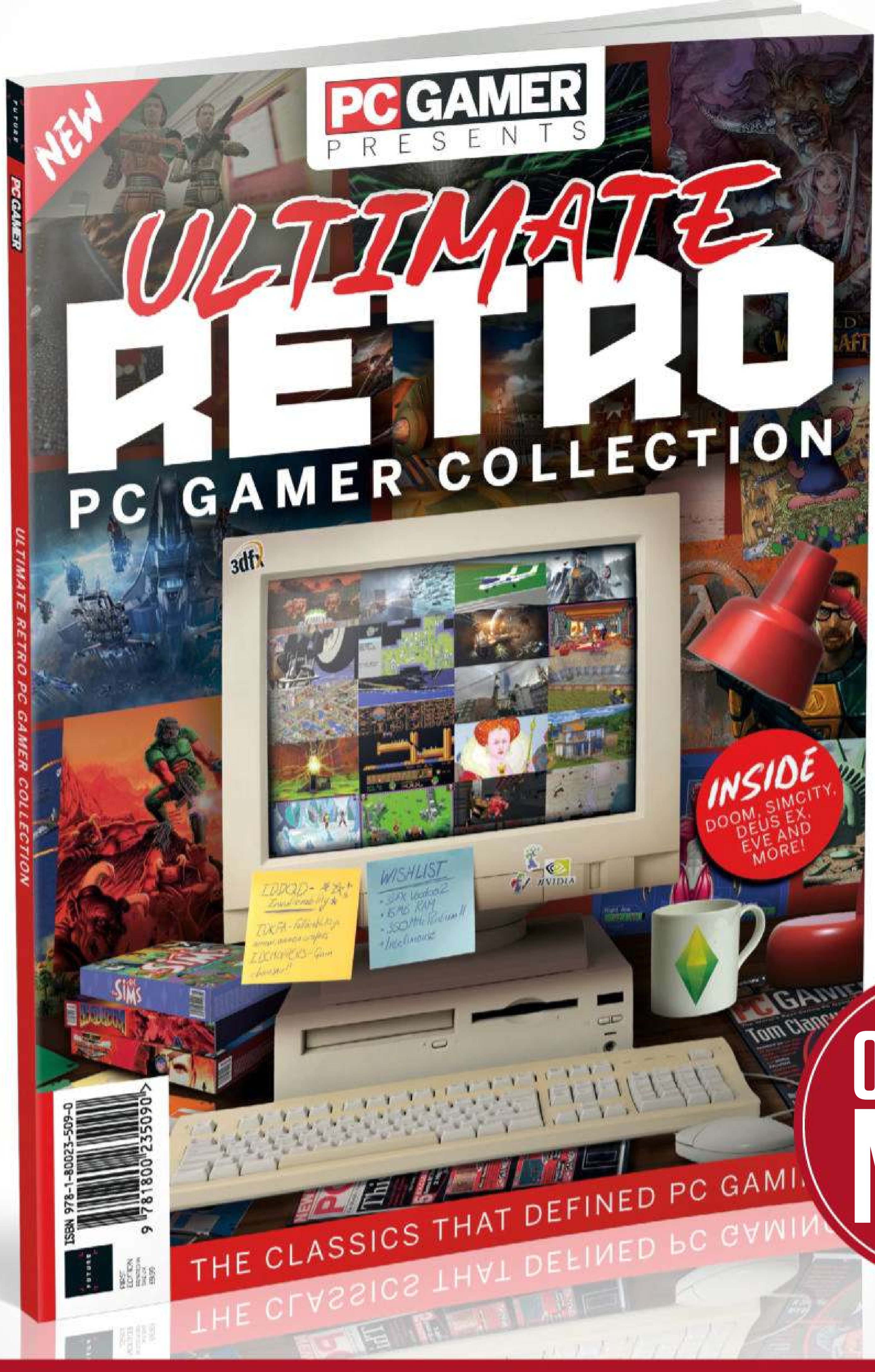
CELEBRATE THE CLASSICS THAT DEFINED PC GAMING

Take a trip through time and experience the titles that made mouse and keyboard gaming so special. We'll also inspect retro hardware and spotlight the essential mods that add a new lease of life to your old favourites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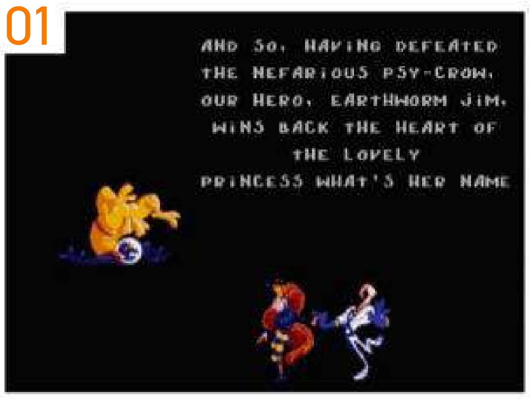
ENDGAME

EARTHWORM JIM 2

» Somewhere under the quiz show segments, stair lift bonus stages, a backpack full of Jim's friend Snot and nefarious lawyers, there must be some sort of plot to *Earthworm Jim 2*. We think it has something to do with Psycrow kidnapping the eternally radiant Princess What's-Her-Name, but if there's one thing we've learned while playing this game, it's not to think too hard. So let's skip to the end and hope it makes some sort of sense…

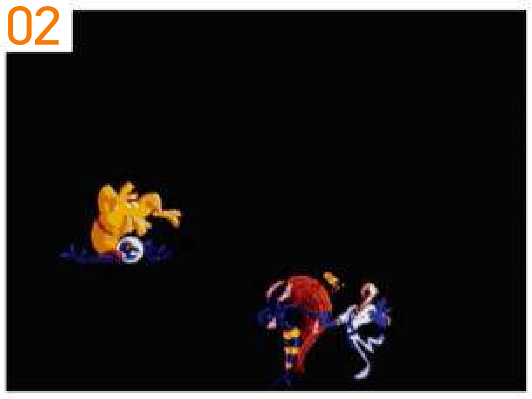
01



AND SO, HAVING DEFEATED
THE NEFARIOUS PSY-CROW,
OUR HERO, EARTHWORM JIM,
WINS BACK THE HEART OF
THE LOVELY
PRINCESS WHAT'S HER NAME

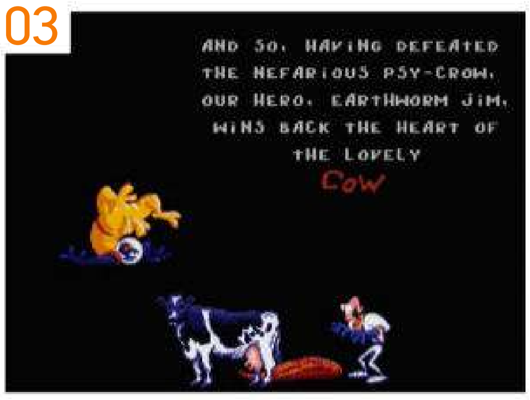
» Ah, good. Jim has battled through all of those stages, and proved that true love always wins. Also, that we might have been wrong about the kidnapping bit. Also also, that romance between insectoids and worms is totally, 100% fine.

02



» But wait! Something appears to be happening to our fair princess! Her sprite warps and contorts as it appears that her true self is attempting to break free. Either that, or she's had a particularly heavy evening at the bar.

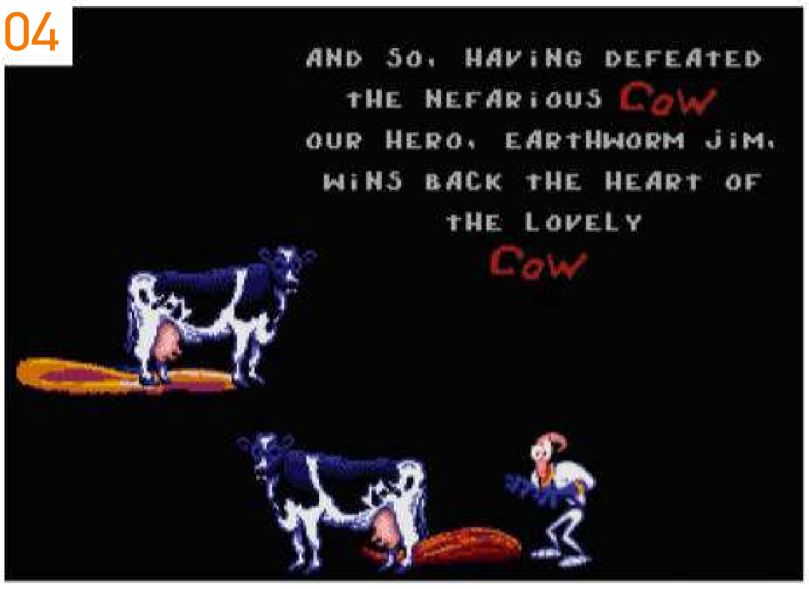
03



AND SO, HAVING DEFEATED
THE NEFARIOUS PSY-CROW,
OUR HERO, EARTHWORM JIM,
WINS BACK THE HEART OF
THE LOVELY
COW

» Oh no. It turns out that Princess What's-Her-Name was not in fact an insectoid after all, but a cow – whether or not the bovine has royal lineage, we can't ever possibly know. We just expected this adventure to have high stakes, not steaks. [That's lame - Ed]

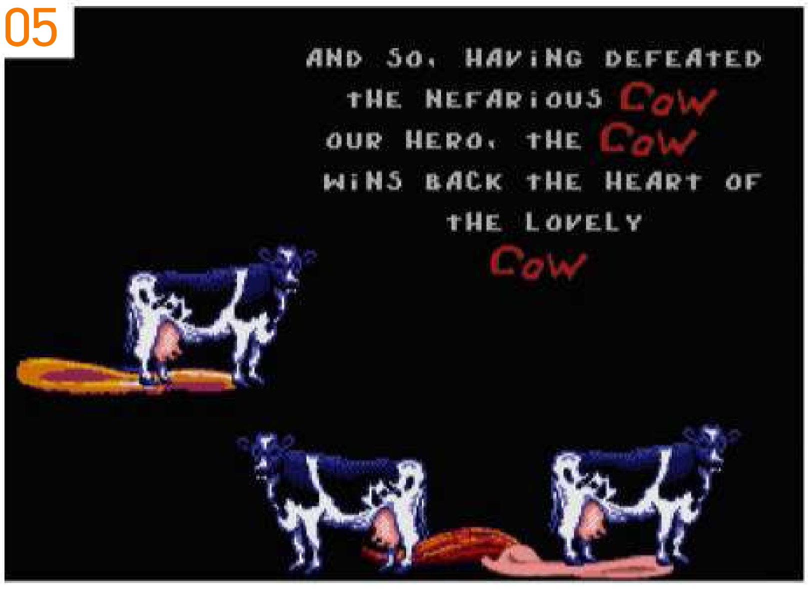
04



AND SO, HAVING DEFEATED
THE NEFARIOUS COW
OUR HERO, EARTHWORM JIM,
WINS BACK THE HEART OF
THE LOVELY
COW

» Well, never let Shiny Entertainment be accused of leaving money on the table, as Psycrow is now also a cow. A tale of intergalactic peril has suddenly devolved into a quarrel at the dairy farm. This is all very a-moo-sing, but is this really the ending Jim could have wanted for his sequel?

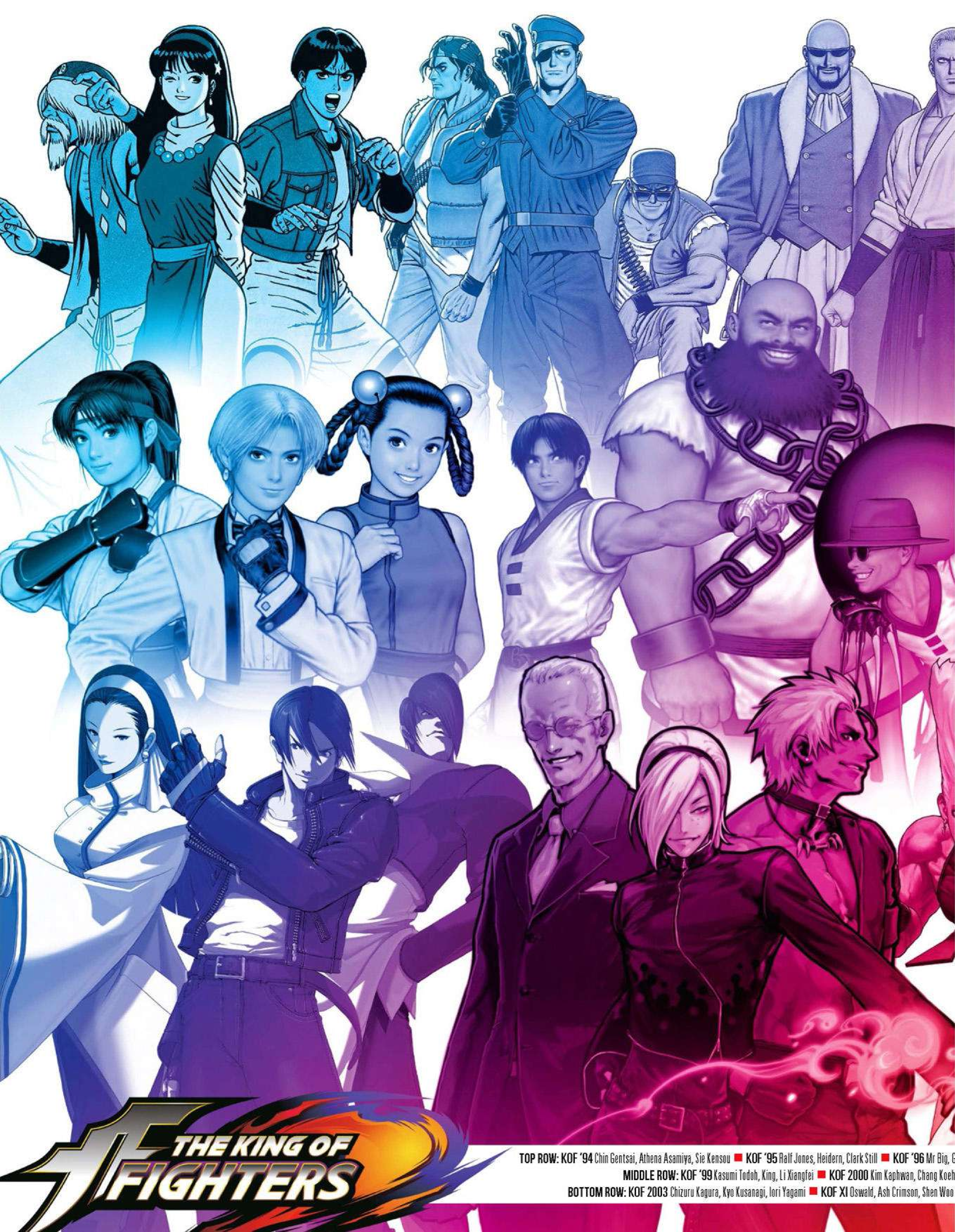
05



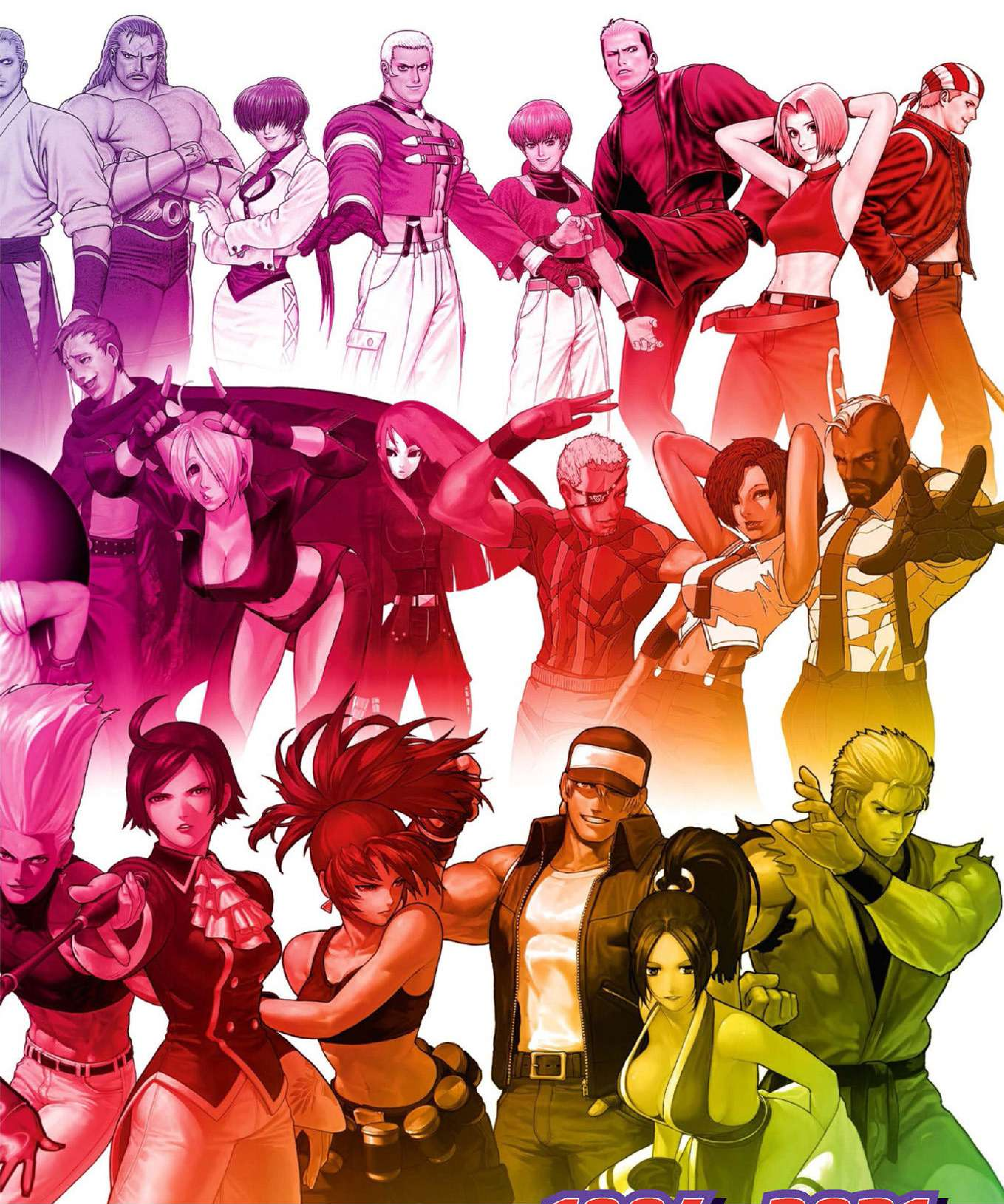
AND SO, HAVING DEFEATED
THE NEFARIOUS COW
OUR HERO, THE COW
WINS BACK THE HEART OF
THE LOVELY
COW

» Never mind, Jim's a cow now too – probably a cash cow, come to think of it. They clearly couldn't resist the cheesy joke one more time, so all of your effort has culminated in a cheap joke that says "nothing you did mattered!" To be honest, we think they really milked it. [You're fired - Ed]

TURN OVER



TOP ROW: KOF '94 Chin Gentsai, Athena Asamiya, Sie Kensou ■ **KOF '95** Ralf Jones, Heidern, Clark Still ■ **KOF '96** Mr Big, G
MIDDLE ROW: KOF '99 Kasumi Todoh, King, Li Xiangfei ■ **KOF 2000** Kim Kaphwan, Chang Koeh
BOTTOM ROW: KOF 2003 Chizuru Kagura, Kyo Kusanagi, Iori Yagami ■ **KOF XI** Oswald, Ash Crimson, Shen Woo



eese Howard, Wolfgang Krauser ■ **KOF '97** Shermie, Yashiro Nanakase, Chris ■ **KOF '98** Ryuji Yamazaki, Blue Mary, Billy Kane
an, Choi Bounge ■ **KOF 2001** K9999, Angel, Kula Diamond ■ **KOF 2002** Ramon, Vanessa, Seth
■ **KOF XII** Benimaru Nikaido, Elisabeth Blanctorche, Leona ■ **KOF XIII** Terry Bogard, Mai Shiranui, Ryo Sakazaki

1994-2021

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We promise never to sell or swap your details, and will always keep them secure. You can view our Privacy Notice in full at www.centrepoint.org.uk/privacy. You can opt out of post and change how we communicate with you at any time. Please call 0800 232320 and speak to one of our friendly team or email supportercare@centrepoint.org to do this and ask us any questions.

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